

Poetry Reprint Series

EARTH TRIUMPHANT

And Other Tales in Verse

by Conrad Aiken

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London

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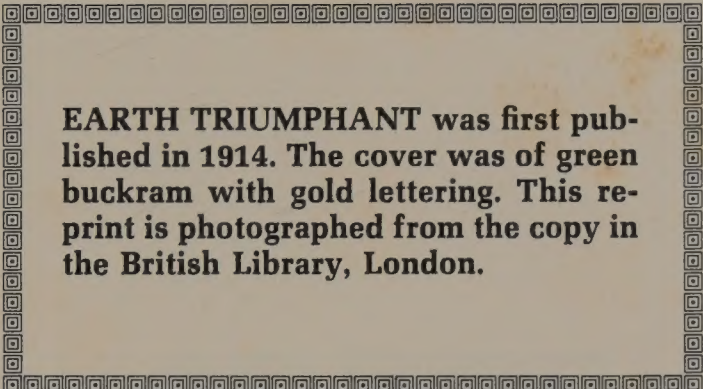
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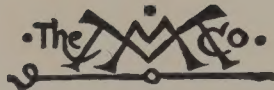


EARTH TRIUMPHANT was first published in 1914. The cover was of green buckram with gold lettering. This reprint is photographed from the copy in the British Library, London.

Poetry Reprint Series: Set One

Robert Graves:	Over the Brazier
H. D.:	Sea Garden
Wallace Stevens:	Harmonium
John Betjeman:	Mount Zion
Conrad Aiken:	Earth Triumphant

EARTH TRIUMPHANT



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BY

CONRAD AIKEN

New York

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To My Wife.

*Whatever loveliness is in this music,
Whatever yearning after lovely things,—
Whatever crying after stars, in darkness,
Whatever beating of impeded wings:*

*Whatever climbing of the rose to sunlight,
Sweet-hearted laugh from the dark blind sod:
Whatever madness of the sea for moonlight,
Whatever yearning of the good to God:*

*All that is beautiful, and all that looks on
beauty*

*With eyes filled with fire, like a lover's eyes:
All of this is yours; you gave it to me, sun-
light!*

*All these stars are yours; you gave them to
me, skies!*

FOREWORD.

Not to disarm criticism, but out of justice to myself, I feel compelled to say here, in view of the fact that I am certain to be called an imitator of Masefield, that before I had ever heard of Masefield I was experimenting with narrative poems of modern daily life. In one case I had even employed the octosyllabic couplet (used so successfully in "The Everlasting Mercy") to tell the love-story of an ordinary clerk.

It will be obvious, of course, that Masefield has influenced me. I found in him many valuable hints toward a method for the work I wanted to do. If with some of his method I unconsciously picked up also some of his mannerisms, that was to be expected, and I can only hope that these echoes

are neither very important nor many. And I believe firmly that my substance and my philosophy, whatever their merits, and despite superficial resemblances, are entirely my own, and entirely different from those of Masfield.

The narrative poems in this book were written a considerable time after my reading of "The Everlasting Mercy" and "The Widow in the Bye Street." In the interim I had done work more experimental in quality and more directly reminiscent. In writing "Youth," "Earth Triumphant," and "Romance," however, I made a deliberate attempt to excise all echoes, and to leave as a basis for dreaded comparisons only the facts that these poems, like Masfield's, are narrative, and are written in certain Chaucerian forms.



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EARTH TRIUMPHANT

EARTH TRIUMPHANT

THE warm sun covers earth again,
And the ivy leaves flash bright with rain,
They sparkle on the garden wall,
Drops, falling, sparkle as they fall;
And there among the dark leaves clings,
Scattering rain-drops with his wings,
A thrush, who having drunk of rain
Bubbles to sun a mirthful strain.
The trees all shake in youthful green,
The grasses shimmer cool and clean,
The meadow-brook sings sweet in flowing,
Dreamless of whither it be going,
And of all living things this day
Who shine with laughter in this May,
Not one, not one who can remember
The bitter blowings of December,
The boughs that creaked, the sod that froze,

The cold stars staring at cold snows.
O Earth, it were a pity then,
Could you not give this grace to men,
Could you not heal them of their sorrow,
Forgetting yesterday, to-morrow,
To live for always in to-day,
As these dumb happy things in May!
To sing the blessedness of sun
Nor sadden when its shine be done,
But only wait like these, and dream,
Or sleep, till April's rainy gleam,—
Through winter's times of snow and sleet,
When thickly round the forest's feet
Lie dead leaves, like old memories dead,
Dead griefs, and happinesses sped. . . .
O Earth it were a pity then,
Could you not give this grace to men,
And make them from their sorrows rise
Like green things new beneath new skies!
Yet here is given the tale of one
Who took this healing of the sun,

And he, though true to earth, her child,
Has been by tongues of men reviled.

Through all his youth an anchorite
He peered at earth by candle-light,
And on a lamp-lit page would read
Of bygone time and ancient deed,
Closing the windows of his room
Lest modern sun should spoil his gloom
Or scare away his magic things,
His faerie visions, holy rings,
And tales in curious language writ,
Strange-charactered, by monkish wit;
And he had always through his youth
Gone devious sombre ways for truth,
Seeking for truth in star and moon
Rather than in the ruddy sun;
Walking abroad in night and mist,
Haply to catch the ghosts at tryst,
With elfin verses in his head
And words too holy to be said.

Ere his own life was yet begun
He had exhausted one by one
Each creed, each weird philosophy,
And reached at last satiety:
Till, wearied much of rhyming words
That sought to mimic song of birds,
He put his books upon their shelf
And went to hear the birds himself,—
Threw up his windows, let in sun,
And called philosophising done.

The sunshine on pale eyes was sweet,
The grass was soft beneath his feet;
Deeply he drank the blue of skies,
And touching earth grew subtly wise,—
Wiser than he had been before
When he beneath his lamp would pore
Over illumined manuscript,—
When frequently his fine pen dipt
To quill slow delicate characters
Upon the margin of a verse.

Beneath his window lilacs grew,
Among his books their perfume blew,
And musing by the window there
He watched them shake their lovely hair,
And watched a flock of sparrows sit
Among the leaves to dart and twit,
Filling the bush with bickerings
And shaking leaves with nervous wings.
He walked abroad in country lanes
Through summer winds, through autumn
rains,

Loving the wind that laughed so wild,
Till he too brimmed with mirth, a child,
And sang out loud,—surprised to hear
His own dead voice rise trembling clear
Among the sumach, sere and red,
With dead leaves loud beneath his tread.
And when he walked in city places
He looked with love on human faces,
And talked with those who sat by him
In the subway, swaying dim,

And smilingly with children spoke
And yearned, although too shy, to stroke
Their soft cheeks and their shining hair,
Or tell them stories strange and rare.
At night he sat in restaurants,
In gay bohemian poets' haunts,
Where poets came with languid locks,
And chorus-girls in gaudy frocks,
Where eyes were quick and wine was flowing
And love was made and money going,
While one man with a violin
Made quavering music, sweet and thin;
And after dinner he might walk
In brightly lighted streets, to talk
With girls whose mouths were very red,
Who held their bodies but as bread,
As broken bread, not more divine,
And no more precious blood than wine.
He sometimes thought,—these might be his
Through all the night with ecstasies,
And he might stroke the subtle flesh,

Snared in an exquisite red mesh,
And hear the clock tick, all night through,
Alone there in the night, they two.
Warmly he shivered, thinking this,
His body warmed with creeping bliss;
But somehow, though he vaguely meant,
The instinct failed, he never went;
Content instead, in front-row seat,
To watch the intricate flash of feet
Of well-trained chorus-girls, who came
In lusty dance, to fill with shame
And ecstasy,—O mingling sweet!—
His eyes, that watched the moving feet,
The legs of lustrous crimson silk,
White petticoats, skin white as milk;
While through his ears, a blandishment,
The implorings of the music went,
Persuasive horn, queer violin,
Dissolving him in bliss of sin . . .
Out of such febrile air he rose
To walk home through the slanting snows,

Breathing deep the cold night air
To make his body clean and fair;
Loving the flakes that touched, to melt,
His stubble cheek, so cool they felt,
And loving storm and loving wind,
They purged his body that had sinned:
Not sinned, perhaps—but from his blood
They purged away this darker mood,
To leave his spirit cold and white
And shining, like a winter's night . . .
But most of all, when night was done,
He loved the ruddy morning sun,
Who shone so warm on his pale face;
Touched every wire and twig with grace,
And flamed on every icicle
Till drops of fire from each one fell!
O every day this gave him joy,
Brimmed him with music, like a boy.

So for a flight of magic days
In these ways and in other ways

The reawakened life in him
Woke tunings intricate with whim,—
Slow, subtle sequences of tone,
Bland horns, a drawling of trombone,
A tentative, perplexing din;
Whence softly rose a violin
To sing a moving phrase, and then
Was lost in jargonings again . . .
From this confusion, tangling sweet,
It needed but a single beat
Swiftly to draw and lead in one
Those subtle sequences of tone,
Out of the deeps each voice to bring
In slow grave symphony to sing,
Bidding it quicken, bidding it rise,
Or steadfast shine, like stars in skies,
Or cry out against all that is
To break its heart with ecstasies. . .

The lamp put lustre in her hair,
Soft reds and greens were mingled there,

Her eyes were fathomlessly dark
Save that remote in each a spark
He saw there, like a flying star
In vast voids where no others are;
Now shining fully like a moon,
Now scattering showers of splendor down,
Or dwindling off remote in space
Till scarcely yearning eyes could trace;
And he would almost hold his breath
Like one who peers, at gates of death,
Through infinite dark silences,
Where not a sound or presence is . . .
Waiting, waiting, for his breath
To come up shining through that death . . .
And all the while upon her knee
Her small hand lay so quietly,
As though it did not know she led
His soul so far among the dead;
Stroking, with a slow caress,
The soft knee and the silky dress,
The fingers hiding soft between

The lustrous little folds of green;
Or curling upward, shy and pale,
To touch a gleaming finger-nail.
Somehow, his stupid voice went on,
It *must* go on, in even tone;
Measuring careful syllables
While all his blood was deaf with bells;
And all his pulses hurried on,
Pattering towards a unison,
Like rain-drops on a window-pane
Making a single hum of rain.
Yet even talking he could note
Her smooth round neck, her mellow throat,
And all the soft shine in her face,
And all her body's breathing grace;
And then came tumult in his hands,
They longed to fly like burning brands,
Madly to whirl about and shatter
This idiotic endless chatter,
Go straight towards her, through it all,
Be plunged as in a waterfall,

And bring her coolness to his mouth,
All of her coolness for his drouth;
To slake his mouth and eyelids burning,
To sate with cool snows all his yearning,
To fill his spirit with her snow,
Have all her coolness in his glow.
Of her he had imperious need,
Without her, broken, he would bleed,
Forever languish incomplete,
A wingless thing, with wounded feet. . .
Aloof and strange the clock struck ten,
And whirred. She hoped he'd come again.—
Perhaps she'd walk with him some day?—
In wind and rain!—Or see a play?—
And then the sweet night swallowed him,
He floated, giddily; and dim
In unperfected memory yet
He could not capture, nor forget,
An earth-sweet face, which like the spring
Made all his pulses glow and sing.

With her, fulfilment came, it seemed:
She was the beauty he had dreamed.
All beauty he had ever loved
Intensely in this woman moved,
And all his dead youth seemed to stir
Whenever he had glimpse of her:
The sunrise seen from long lost heights,
Forgotten valleys filled with lights,
The stars which he had loved when young,
The songs to him in childhood sung;
And flowers, so near and friendly then,
Seemed close and intimate again,
Just as they were when once he lay
In soft grass on a summer's day,
With daisy's petals by his cheek
So living that they seemed to speak,
And little clover, green and white,
Never so fragrant as at night;
While humming-birds with mazy wing
Made the trumpet-flowers swing,
And mulberries fell pattering down,

Whereto the ants came, black or brown,
He watched them by his small hand pass
In the green forests of the grass. . .
Now all these things seemed close as then;
Close were the faces, too, of men,
He noted lines that had escaped .
His eyes before, and how were shaped
The lips, the nostrils, or the chin,
And if their hands were white and thin,
And all the movement that's in eyes,
And all the light that in them lies.
The very texture of the stone,
Beneath his feet, to him was known.
The leaves upon the lilac-tree,
So smooth, in essence were as she;
The wind that blew upon his face,
Shaking trees, had stolen her grace,
Some secret of her in it moved,
And lo, this wind he touched and loved,
Breathed deeply of this vagrant air
And welcomed it among his hair.

He would have dallied if he could
A long while with this joyous mood,
To muse, to talk of her, content,
While days and nights like music went:
Content in light of her to pass
His days, as, with the sunlight, grass.
For all the things of earth now seemed
Sweet as sweet faces that are dreamed,
And all with an inward glory bright
Which reached in her a perfect light. . .
But something, some dim restlessness,
Of which he scarce had consciousness,
The subtle impulse that in spring
Makes daisies grow and thrushes sing,
Left him discontent with this,—
To talk of her, forego her kiss.
And so he lay awake long hours,
Traced on the wall the patterned flowers,
And while the clock ticked, cold and slow,
Carefully backward would he go
In hushed mind over memories of her

To ask if she were friend or lover:
Sifting her lightest glance with eyes
So frightened they could not be wise,—
Weighing the lightest word she'd said
With held breath, heart that slowed with
dread.

What meant these things? He did not know.
She *must* love one who loved her so!
And when at times he so construed
Some subtle tone of hers, or mood,
Then straightway flushed his brow with heat,
Loudly began his heart to beat,
Tumultuous all his pulses sang,
With little bells his temples rang;
And moist with fever he would rise
To stand at window, stare at skies,
While love seemed sudden to fill his throat
And all his room to rock and float. . .
Until across the sleeping town
Came elfin bell-notes coldly down,
Like voices falling faint and far

From frozen moon or haunted star,
And a white horror slid between
This lover and his earthly queen;
Even as frightened spirits run
When cock-crow shrills at reddening sun. . .

They climbed a wild hill, green with copse;
Giddily in the birch-tree tops
The red-winged blackbirds widely swayed
Joyful in sunshine, unafraid,—
Wonderful sky-things, balancing
So high, with hardly a stir of wing.
Beneath the hill a plain was spread,
In dusty green, with houses red,
And one small pond which towards the sky
Stared with a wide blue open eye.
Beyond all these the city lay,
Smoky, with roofs of serried grey,
And smoky trees, and smoky grass,
And one high dome that blazed like brass:
And chimneys tall and black, wherethrough

Glittered beyond the sea's wet blue,
O wonderful wild blue, drawn so fine
In that far clear horizon line!—
On this she looked with blowing hair,
By wind and sun made trebly fair;
So wonderful that he was weak,
His voice broke tremor when he would speak.
They sat and talked, of little things;
For him, with perilous balancings,—
Difficult breath and gasping words,
Words as fleeting and shy as birds.
She told his fortune, took his hand
Ingenuously, and deeply scanned
Across the palm the netting fine,
Intricate etchings of white line;
Puckered her puzzled brow, and frowned,
Before she told him what she found:
'If you should ever love, have fear!
Near death is written plainly here,
For her or you I cannot say;
Else, why should this line break this way?—'

She laughed. A black cloud drenched the
sun

And suddenly all the earth grew dun. . .
They rose, returning. As they went
Vaguely, a cold presentiment
Slid snake-like through his mood of mirth;
And when the sun reconquered earth
Still through their laughter he could hear
'If you should ever love, have fear!'

To-night or next night should it be?
This phrase he mused incessantly;
Feeling that all life came to urge
This action; seeming to converge
With all the weight of earth and sky
And sun and stars and times gone by,
Until it was no longer he
But life, in all infinity,
That moved resistless to this aim;
Whatever end, not his the blame. . .
Meanwhile the rain-drops cooled his face,

He walked on with a quickened pace,
The wind shook trees and made them cry,
They tossed against a rapid sky,
Showing pale undersides of leaf,
Swishing and writhing, bacchic grief.
Omens! This violence and this dark
Troubled his soul and left a mark;
With lowered face he went his way,
Doubt shook him, all his mood was grey.
The door-bell rung, he stood in rain,—
In misery of doubt and pain;
Yet through an arc-light's fitful gloom
He saw forsythia trees in bloom,
Glowing and golden in the night,
So living and so filled with light. . .
These lit his heart. A moment's space,
He scarce had time to dream her face,
And the door opened, it was she,
Far lovelier than a dream could be;
He heard her speaking, touched her hand,
Briefly across her dark eyes scanned,

Feeling a soft sense, sweet and warm,
Of being alone with her in storm;
Then they with shy aloofness moved,
Lest each might think the other loved,
To sit and talk. . . While on the pane
Came gusty patterings of rain,
And they could hear the trees outside
That swished against the wind, and cried,
In bacchic frenzy, anguished bliss,
Against a stormy lover's kiss.
The clock upon the mantelpiece
Ticked on, it would not ever cease,
But in the intervals of quiet,
In momentary lull of riot,
Delicate, between word and word,
The little beat of it was heard;
Measuring life that flowed away,
The blood's alternate night and day,
And urging on, still urging on,—
To what? What final dusk or dawn?
And suddenly now it seemed a part

Of this vast tide that bore his heart
Dizzily to some dizzy height,
A part of all this rushing flight,
Its index of approaching time
When spent soul need no more to climb,
But blasted by a blazing sky
Must be transfigured or must die.
A breathlessness came over him,
His hands upon his knee seemed dim,
And nebulous his body seemed;
And with queer loudness, as if dreamed,
His voice went on, in empty chatter
Of weighty things that did not matter.
A breathlessness, a breathlessness,
Rushing him on, with no redress,
No pause, no pity, though he strove
And cried out to the tide that drove
His helpless spirit through this dark.
Wherein remotely shone a spark;
And all this darkness seemed to be
Her dark eyes' vast infinity,

Infinity of fear and doubt
Whence there was never coming out,
And no salvation, save he came
Through space and time to that far flame
Which when she smiled came up to him,
Making his body reel and swim.
The lamp put lustre in her hair,
Gleamed upon arms and shoulders bare;
One arm across a cushion lay,
So white, it made his spirit pray,
And in his hands a yearning came
To stroke that flesh as smooth as flame.
More than a little moment's space
He dared not look upon her face,
For swift her deep eyes drew him down
To darkneses where he would drown;
And yet they called him back again,
To look away from them was pain,
He felt their wonder taking him
And felt the world slip backward dim,
Her power was a magic one,

He went as white mist goes to sun.
Towards her mouth his spirit went
As for a single kiss 'twere meant,
Then darkness ever; yet his brain
Even in midst of all this pain
Somehow made shift to capture words,
Setting them free like frightened birds
That flashed all ways with startled winging,
Scattered, yet all in sunlight singing,
Singing the one thing, earthly bliss,
Half joy, half terror, before the kiss. . .
And after, when he'd kissed her eyes,
For these wild words they deemed him wise,
Saying, that they (O frightened wing!)
Had worked the wonder of this thing;
So wonderful, they sat quite still
While rain dripped at the window-sill,
Quiet as trees are, when the hour
Has come to them that gives them flower;
Quiet and shy as gentle earth
In dusk before the sun brings mirth;

Quiet as God, when he had made
These stars, and, seeing, was half afraid.
And they could hear the trees outside
That swished against the wind, and cried,
In mænad fury, anguished bliss,
Against a stormy lover's kiss;
And felt a soft sense, sweet and warm,
Of being alone, secure, in storm,
Too drunk with loveliness to speak,
Just touching lips, or brow, or cheek,
While through dark eyes their spirits went
On an eternal mission sent,
Quietly, holily, as they move
Who fear to break the hush of love.

The springtime of his life was this:
All earth seemed sweet to love and kiss,
The bark of trees, the blades of grass
Whereover softly he would pass,
The very bricks beneath his feet
Seemed, with kinship to her, sweet;

And he would stroke with lover's hand
All smooth things,—seemed to understand
At last their beauty and their place,
Each seemed to lift a gentle face—
And all the universe stood still
While out of love he drank his fill;
The roses blossomed for his sake;
For him from dark the sun would break,
The thrush sang on the lilac spray,
For him the night succeeded day;
His love for her, earth's love of sun,
Seemed mingling wonderfully in one. . .
And in this symphony of flame,
Like a dream his marriage came,
A minor voice, a silver laughter
Of little horns; and then rose after
The violins in rapid shine,
Intricate, myriad-voiced, divine,
Shimmering, and the music rose
To all the glory music knows,—
Magniloquent, a cosmic thing,

As though the universe should sing.
She was his life! If she should die,
Motionless would his body lie,
They breathed one single song of breath,
One life, and they die one death. . .
And if her face's shine went dim
That instant would it fade in him,
And all the mirth in them be dead
And all the light in them be shed:
O wistfully they talked of this,
Yet lost it in a trembling kiss. . .
So, pleasant hours and pleasant days
Went past them in a giddy maze,
And holding love they held the key,
He thought, to immortality. . .
And chancing shortly after then
To fall in with old friends again,
Who bore him off perforce to see
The latest musical comedy,—
To sink back in a front-row seat
And watch the intricate flash of feet

Of well-trained chorus-girls, who came
To give him ecstasy and shame,—
With legs of lustrous saffron silk,
White frills, and skin as white as milk,
With sexual laughter, nods and becks,
Mechanical display of sex,—
While through his ears, a blandishment,
The implorings of the music went:
Suddenly, all this powdered lust
Had filled him with a sad disgust,—
He looked on meretricious clothing
And straightway he was sick with loathing;
And while his friends perspired with bliss,
At thinking of a chorine's kiss,
Lo, beauty like a lightning came
To strike this ugliness with flame. . .
The man, he mused, who once knows love
No baser lust can ever move;
No, and no human face could lure
His heart again. . . His earth was sure.

Earth's irony! Though sure it seemed,
Lo, all its sureness was but dreamed.
Through brightest noon a darkness runs.
Night whelms down the hugest suns.
Death lodges him in sweetest flower,
And poison makes of sweetest hour.

His wife died sharp at ten o'clock,
That night. . . Yet time had felt no shock,
Nor paused, but still this clock went on
Which told them when her soul had gone.
She lay outstretched in candle-gloom,—
Save that, no whit was changed her room:
For still the tall glass glimmered there
Where night and day she did her hair,
And over a chair-back still hung down
Her soft pink satin dressing-gown.
And yet a quietness was there
Which seemed the breathing of despair;
And though the chamber showed no change,
Yet, there was something still and strange.

She lay outstretched, in candle-light;
So she would lie, nor stir, all night,
Not move one finger, no, nor seek
A single thing, nor try to speak.
He could not understand this thing.
Nothing, to which his mind might cling!
And never moving, by her side,
He sat and held her hand and cried,
And stroked her arms, so pale they were,
And tried to make her eyelids stir
By touching with his finger-tips,
Or brushing gently with his lips,
Or breathing on them. . . Yet her sleep
Had covered her so cold and deep,
That though a long, long while he gazed,
Hoping to see her eyelids raised,—
Quite close, until he touched her cheek;
And though at intervals he'd speak,
Though all her little names were said,—
Still she lay silent, like one dead. . .
At times, his grief was passionate

And he cried out, importunate;
And he would raise her from the bed
Hold in his arms her languid head,
And beg her to be kind to him,
While tears came and his eyes were dim;
And her sweet face, sweet piercingly,
He kissed and kissed, half angrily;
And panic madness took him, then,
Thinking, not many times again
He'd kiss her face,—a little while;
A last time he had seen her smile,—
Only this morning, when they walked
Out in the garden, laughed and talked,
While she with pruning-scissors went,
Over her roses softly bent,
And clipped dead leaves. . . Have pity,
God!

She would be hidden under sod,
Cramped in a dark and narrow place
With all that dirt above her face,
And never see the sun, the sky,

But there in soundless darkness lie
With not a soul to talk to her
While year by year she could not stir,
While rain came trickling downward cold
To damp her hair, and stain with mold
Her gentle face, her white shut eyes,
Her brow so beautiful and wise,—
Alone, and he would never see
This face again, not even he,
He, for whom it meant so much,
Who shook with anguish but to touch.
So, panic-struck he kissed her cheek
Imploring her once more to speak,
Only one little word to say
Before they hurried her away;
He would not let them! He would keep
Inviolatè her quiet sleep,
Keep her in her own room here,
With shutters down, year after year,
Till some mysterious dawn would break
And she would wake, and she would wake!

They could not hide his love away!
But he would see her day by day,
Still have his lover by his side
Pretending that she had not . . . died,
And leave her little things all there
As she had left them; on her chair
Her dressing-gown where she had thrown,—
She'd need it when her sleep was flown.
It would not be so hard, if he
Could always steal in quietly
And have her face to look at there,
And touch the softness of her hair;
But if they hid her face from him,
His memory would fade and dim
Till he could scarce remember her,
Or cruel memory would err,
And there would be to touch and see
Nothing of all her sanctity,
Never upon this earth again;
O God have pity on this pain!—

And then the ballet dancers came
Before his mind, and utter shame
Shook him with sobs that he should be
In such a sordidness, while she
Caught at her breath, and cried for him
To see him ere her eyes went dim.
He told her he had come; but she
Lay there so white, so silently;
She must see! and in last despair,
To find if they might still be there,
He raised her eyelids, small and white,
And saw the brown eyes void of light,—
Unseeing, rigid, glazing fast;
And then he knew the truth at last;
And never moving, by her side,
He sat and held her hand and cried,
Yearning to kiss her, yet afraid
Of pain,—if she no motion made,—
At finding out her death anew;
And yet he kissed her, all night through.

When he first ventured out, the earth
Seemed strange to him, and stripped of
mirth,

A vast, a grey, an empty place,
Like a huge body without a face;
Or like a face that had no eyes,
Smooth flesh insensible to skies.
No soul in it! and he could feel
A horror,—nausea made him reel.
He hated all these fleshly trees
Who sucked from death their ecstasies;
The soulless grass he hated too;
For with a million mouths it drew
Its fleshly substance from decay,
Its greenness was all made of grey.
The sun sprawled soulless in the street.
And so he turned with giddy feet
From this drear world, all empty now,
Over his musty desk to bow,—
Dull-eyed to take down many a book,
To open them with absent look,

Swallow a scrannel paragraph
And wretchedly, thereat, to laugh.

A loneliness, a loneliness,
An absence of all loveliness,
Like misty rain began to fall
Upon his heart; and very small
Through silent spaces, all alone,
Without the light of star or moon,
He travelled, and looked everywhere
As though a thing were hidden there. . .
To go where he, with her, had been,
To see the houses she had seen,
The streets she walked in, and had made
Her own, in sun or rain or shade:
This anguished him; in such a street
He half believed that he might meet,—
Last year it often happened so,—
Her coming, musingly and slow,
So soft in white, her dark eyes shining,
Pink roses on her straw hat twining;

She might come, sudden, round this turn!
And thinking this his heart would yearn,
And all his wretched pulses beat;
Until he saw the empty street,
The sidewalk stretching far away,
And nought else, save the light of day,
Or strangers, and the walls of stone
Which she had somehow made her own.
And many days had come and gone
Before one morning, just at dawn,
After a long and sleepless night
He looked out in the misty light
And saw her garden, tempest-blown,
Littered with dead leaves. . . Weeds had
 grown
Profusely in her favorite bed,
Rose petals on the loam were shed;
And seeing it neglected so,
This thing she loved. . . If she should
 know!
She must know! And remorse was his,

He broke the garden's sanctities,
Thinking of that last morning there
And how the sunshine glossed her hair,—
And how these petals, strewn in sun,
Were roses she had smiled upon,
Or touched . . . and how she loved them
all,
And grieved, if one of them should fall.
These roses that were fully blown
To her as little buds were known, .
Out of their hearts a fragrance came
Of her, and he was sick with shame
That all these days he should have left
Her in the garden here, bereft!
And often he would turn to see
If there behind him she might be,
So close she seemed; but all was bare,
A wind, a perfume in the air,—
And that was all. Yet when at last
Into the house he slowly passed,
His heart wrenched out of him, to go

Among the roses she loved so.
And when her robin ran through dew,
And so precisely as she knew
Sang out his early morning strain,
He thought he could not bear the pain.

A loneliness, a loneliness,
An absence of all loveliness,
Came down upon his heart like rain,
Insistent, gentle fall of pain,
With not a pause, and not a let,
No chance was given to forget;
But unresisting, as the leaf
Bends under rain, so he in grief,
And always would this rain have kept
To darken him, and would have wept
Had sun come wounding at his eyes,
The brazen laugh of brazen skies. . .
And faithlessness it would have been,
It would have seemed the blackest sin,
To let this grief be blown away

By the windy light of day;—
One way there was and one way only
Of truth to her:—in being lonely;
In yearning for her day and night;
In feeling her as loss of light;
As silence coming coldly round,
As loss of music, loss of sound;
Though still vague echo in the air
Told that song was lately there. . .
And all day long from room to room
He wandered in the shuttered gloom,
Touching curtains, touching walls,
Startled at his own footfalls;
Or stood so still he'd hear the chime
Of clocks upstairs, yet feared to climb
Those stairs, lest having gone he'd find
Only the hush she'd left behind.
Her clock! and sudden anguish came
At thinking of the bitter shame
If he had let it stop, unwound;
Yet it was going still, he found,

Ticking on her mantelpiece;
He would not let it ever cease;
For all its impulse came from her,
Without her hands it would not stir,
But she had wound it, patiently,
The very day, perhaps, that she . . .
He took the key with dim eyes then
And seemed to touch her hand again;
O God if for a second's space
She'd come and let him see her face,
While she was standing there that day
Musing, gazing far away,
And with slow hand revolved this key! . .
And then he realized that he
Was in her room, and then he cried,
For all was just as when she died;—
Over a chair-back hanging down
Her soft pink satin dressing-gown;
Drawn curtains, luminous with sun,
Two candles into sockets run;
And still untouched upon her bed

The pillow, hollowed by her head.
And this he stroked with finger-tips
And touched with never-sated lips;
Into this pillow and this sheet
Had passed her body's little heat,
And thence upon the air had gone
As darkness goes out upon dawn.
And then a while, a spirit dazed,
On all her little things he gazed,
Saw in the closet hanging there
Soft dresses that she used to wear,
Her hats, her ribbons, laces laid
In rows, some by her own hands made. . .
No one would ever change this room,
Forever would it stay in gloom,
Untouched . . . and yet, since she liked sun,
Over the floor he let it run,
A singing, dancing flood of light,
Making the hazy ceiling bright,
And making all the room so gay
That he was hurt, and crept away,

Resolving not to come there more.
He stood a space: then locked the door,
And took the key with him, and went
Downstairs again to banishment.

A loneliness, a loneliness,
An absence of all loveliness,
It came like mingled snow and rain,
Softly, and yet a steady pain,
And mutely like the winter earth
In dumb forgetfulness of mirth
His heart lay still; and did not move,
So crushed with unforgotten love.
It was a stab of pain to go
To places that she did not know,
See houses she had never seen
In cities where she'd never been;
And though it was a pang to pass
Through streets she loved, or over grass
Whereon together they had strayed,
Yet he preferred this pang,—afraid

To steal through streets that nothing kept
Of her who now forever slept.

And so, and always, back he came,
He burned, yet could not leave the flame;
Through streets that tortured him he stole,
Past houses, trees, that cut his soul;
And once, when happening to see
A place where they had taken tea,
He dared not face the endless pain
Of passing it, and so again
Went in, alone, for tea and cake,
Took just the things that she would take,
And stared at them, and went away
Leaving them, untouched, on the tray.

O, and how often if by chance
Some beauty held his absent glance,
Some beauty which he could not share
With her,—sudden it seemed unfair,
That he should be alive to see
This loveliness, and yet, not she!
And so he turned his back, was driven

Back to her garden as to haven,
To touch her roses, care for them,
Pick scales away from leaf and stem,
And suffer endlessly the pang
When cheerfully her robin sang;
While else, upon his hungry ears,
Came only quiet, still as tears. . .
Lying awake sometimes it seemed,
When long and wakefully he dreamed
Nightmarish dreams, that he must spend
All of his life, without an end,
In going to see, however far,
All things she'd looked at, earth or star,
House and face and sea and steeple,
And comedies, and all the people
That she had ever seen in trains,
And all the hills and all the plains,
And all the sunsets in the sky
And all that she had seen go by,
Hear all the music she had heard,
Read all she'd read, each little word,

And walk on stones she'd walked upon,
And go on journeys she had gone,
Touch her leaf and touch her flower,
And day by day and hour by hour
Unravel all her life again,
Unknot each point with subtlest pain,
Minute by minute, till he had—
O God, till he was going mad!
And then he covered face, and cried
O God that she, not he, had died!

And yet, time passed, time somehow passed.
Into his old life he was cast,
Drew down his windows, shut out sun,
And took his books down one by one,
To read old tales of vanished times,
To while the hours with gentle rhymes,
And bury under word and word
The clock's tick so forever heard.
And each philosophy, each creed,
With eager glances he would read,

Hoping, at his journey's end,
That he would blissfully ascend
Into heavens filled with peace
Where all his weariness would cease,
Where gentle solace he would find
And patience that would lead him blind
Through all life's waste; or at the last,
When all the desert had been past,
To give him faith that he might meet
In death one who alive was sweet.
His grief now was a quiet thing,
Gentle, and not so quick to wing,
And now the silence of this place
Was home to him, and he could face
Her picture, even: pain dwelled there,
Yet it was pain that he could bear.
And now it was a sacred rite
Beside her picture, every night,
To set two candles, there to shine
All night, as if it were a shrine;
And always on his desk to keep,

Where dusty books were piled up deep,
Two roses in a little vase;
And often then his eyes he'd raise
To look, or stroke a petal's cheek,
Or listen, wishing they would speak. . .
And then go on with quickened eye
To read queer tales of times gone by,
Of magic mirrors, magic rings,
Wicked, elfin, holy things,
Of flying horses, talking birds,
All written down in dewy words,
And many things of ancient time
Told with musick and with rhyme.
And in this world of books again
Fainter grew the world of men,
And paler grew the light of sun;
And by wan light of star and moon,
That gentler was upon his eyes,
Coming from remoter skies,
He mused abroad and tried to find
The solace that's within the mind.

What was it?—Often he read on
Till night was dusking into dawn,
Till the red sun swimming came
To turn the dew-drops into flame,
And all the roosters, crowing shrill,
Stirred the town, in twilight still,
Answering from wall to wall,
Waiting betwixt call and call;
Till upon the mantelpiece
Both the candles were but grease,
All their light gone, only grey.
Then he put his books away,
Weary, with a weight of grief,
Too tired to turn another leaf;
And making of his palm a cup
He picked the roses' petals up,—
Where they'd fallen on green baize,
Softly, underneath the vase,—
And climbed the silent stairs to bed,
Slowly, with a gentle tread,

Lest he make an echo stir,
And lest he wake the ghost of her. . .

In weariness, in weariness,
He found a balm for loneliness,
And all the summer, in the dim,
His dusty volumes wearied him,
They blurred his eyes and fogged his brain,
They gave him sleep to dull his pain;
And farther, farther from his ken
Receded that small world of men,
That world which strangely left behind
A whirling sunlight in his mind,
A world of color, shape, and sound,
Where grass grew thickly on the ground,
Where densely hung the leaves of green
With sparrows rustling in between . . .
While sun was here and sun was there
Putting life in branches bare,
And myriad rain-drops came in showers
Like lovers to the quiet flowers,

And robins all the sweeter thrilled
Because their throats with rain were filled,
And all earth was a lovely place
That worshipped at one shining face!—
A world of spring . . . He looked out now,
The leaves were fallow on the bough,
Black boughs, where yellow leaves and red
Hung limp, while some, already shed,
Lay matted dankly on the earth
Blown down in midst of bacchic mirth;
And over all, the dark boughs through,
Sharply, the sky's autumnal blue . . .
A little while, grey sky and snow . . .
And of all this, what did she know?
Could she feel dead leaves settling down,
The scarlet maple, oak leaves brown?
These purple asters, did she see?
None who had loved them more than she!
And, strange, he longed to write to her,
To tell her how these earth-things were,
Tell how her roses blossomed so,

And robin left two weeks ago . . .
How all the leaves on all the trees
Were holding bacchic mysteries,
Drinking some strange autumn breath
Of subtle air that gave them death:
Death most glorious ever seen
Living fire that burst from green
Consuming all the trees like song
And licking heaven with flaming tongue!
Then suddenly fell his bolt of shame:
To say, 'earth goes on, just the same! . . .
Fierce autumn burns in every leaf . . .'
He did sharp penance, then, of grief.

Sometimes his wound bled fresh again:
As one day, when in misty rain,
When rain was dripping from wet eaves
And weighing down the fevered leaves,
He walked, scarce conscious of the way,
Into the churchyard where she lay.
Almost a fortnight he'd let pass.

Now on the wet and fading grass,
Lay dead leaves in a yellow heap
As though they came with her to sleep,—
Soft maple leaves, and flaming yet,
So bright they were with being wet.
And everything was there so still,
So quiet the trees stood on the hill,
That there was not a sound, except
The little rain, that always kept
A pattering, a pattering,
On earth and leaves and everything.
It seemed all earth forbore to stir
So he might bend and speak to her,
Touch wet grass with finger-tips
And close to earth put down his lips,
And bring her hidden body near
So she might hear, so she might hear.
What did she think of, all this space?
And did this cold rain wet her face?
O God he longed to see her so!
Only an hour, so they might know

All griefs that each one grieved alone,
So pain might vanish, being known!
So he might say he loved her still,
And yet, at times, against his will,
Her sweet face vanished from his mind,
A fire blown out, nor could he find
For hours that white face anywhere;
If he could only touch her hair
With fingers, as he used to do,
So soft, when all alone, they two,
They sat at home on days like this,—
If he could only have one kiss
Of lips or cheek, or on her eyes,—
(Both eyes, for fear of jealousies)—
He'd know her loveliness again
And there'd be beauty in this pain.
What loneliness she must feel here!
And then he seemed to see her clear,
Her small face wonderfully at rest,
Her small hands folded on her breast,
So pallid, in her crimson laid,

Seeming to dream, so unafraid . . .
And yet, this calm of hers was lie;—
For she had gone without good-bye,
Without their good-bye kiss, which they
Gave always, when they went away;
And he knew full well, thinking this,
Her heart had broken for that kiss,—
Having, without his touch, to go
Out on a dark she did not know . . .
Why did she lie there now so still,
And he so close?—Could not her will
Push earth and leaves and grass aside,
Could she not hear him if he cried?—
And then his whole heart burst with grief,
His hand was on a rainy leaf,
The wet grass pressed his mouth, while he
Sobbed her name, twice, quietly . . .
Still there was not a sound, except
The little rain, that always kept
On earth, and leaves, and everything,
A pattering, a pattering.

Yet, though he often pulled the blind
To shut out sun, within his mind
Came back again that world of spring
Where earth in sunlight seemed to sing,
And green boughs moved against the sky,
With talking leaves, and birds flashed by;
And brooding on an ancient page,
Hushed waters of a frozen age,
Above those twilight waters came
This world like living sun of flame,
And all his grief began to seem,
Beside that freshness, like a dream.
It all came clear to him, and sweet;
He felt cool grass beneath his feet,
Was conscious of the moving earth,
Felt stirrings of her living mirth . . .
And all his books seemed grey and dead
Like withered petals long time shed,
And all philosophy seemed dust
That whirled strange shapes for every gust;
Never would he discover there

A consolation for despair.
His clock struck nine, his clock struck ten;
And still he mused on this; and then
He felt within his soul ascend,
Quietly as a breath of wind
That blows in May through apple-bloom,
A cool light coming through the gloom;
And in his room there seemed to be
A fragrance, it was surely she,
For all his spirit seemed to float,
So easily, and from his throat
A pressure gave, and all his face
Seemed light with some celestial grace;
Across his brow her cool hands lay,
He seemed to hear her laugh, and say
That it was time, high time at last,
For grief to be forgot and past,
That he, philosophising done,
Must lift his face again to sun
And go where apple-blossoms blew
Like snows across the fields, wherethrough

The blue-birds, with their tawny breasts,
Glanced in sunlight to their nests.
For he must rise and live again,
And walk among the world of men,
Touch earth, and take her wind and rain
Gently to heal him of his pain . . .
And then truth came, he seemed to rise
Released at last through quiet skies,
Through silver airs of heaven, whereon
Hung gentlest music of a dawn,
And all that music seemed to be
A praise of being high and free,
Of coming joy and going sorrow
Of going night and coming morrow;
And wings released at last for flight
Flashed whitely upward through the night . . .
Three petals, pink upon green baize,
He picked up underneath the vase,
And on the mantelpiece he turned
One candle that uneven burned;
And then looked outward through the night

And saw the autumn stars, so bright,
Shine downward through the branches dark,
Already leafless, drear and stark.
Alternate day and night a while,
And lo, once more in green would smile
Maple and sycamore and oak . . .
Then something little in him broke,
And all was plain: for she would be
Unhappy just as long as he,
And sad as long as he was sad;
But she would laugh, he being glad! . . .
Dawn came, new dawn. The moon went
down.

Cocks crowed across the sleepy town;
Languid and faint the red sun came
And bathed the steeples in young flame;
And a white peace flowed wide between
This lover and his ghostly queen.

Go winter, and come quickly spring!
Robin, come north again and sing!—

Over the snowy earth he walked,
All nature smiled to him and talked,
And this remote blue winter sky
So unapproachable, so high,
Smiled friendly down,—he thought it said
That past days were forever dead,
With cloud and dark, and now for earth
Quiet it shone, with candid mirth.
And all these birch trees, shaking bare
And silvery in the winter air,
Were conquering a forgotten grief,
Already dreaming of new leaf!
The sunset gleamed on ice and snow,
The western hills were all aglow,
And through the oaks the red sun dropped;
And then the bitter north wind stopped,
And underneath this ice and snow
He heard the small brook singing flow,—
As though in April's sun and shadow
It watered cowslips in a meadow.
The frosty night came cold and clear;

Yet in that stillness he could hear
Under the whiteness and the cold
Roots starting in the frozen mold . . .
And then he felt new life in him
Like flowers of red surge up and swim
Through all his blood; and all earth moved
With life of her whom he had loved,
Till she was earth and earth was she,
She was this snow, this brook, this tree . . .
And joy rose up in him, and song,
As buoyantly he walked along:
Go winter, and come quickly spring,
Robin, come north again and sing!

Spring in his soul so strong he felt
That when earth's snows began to melt
He deemed that it was earth and he
In subtly planned conspiracy;
For earth was she and she was earth,
She was his mistress and his mirth,
And she and he on pleasure bent

This sunlight and this joyance sent.
What joy this was! From sunny eaves
Drops sparkled down, and grass and leaves
Already through earth's snow appeared
Where earth by hazy sun was cleared;
And down the streets began to flow
Bright rivers from the dying snow,
Rapidly braiding streams that sung
Melodious spring, impetuous, young;
And icicles fell tinkling down
And earth came upward, steaming brown,
And wet snow from the roofs was slipping
And everywhere was ceaseless dripping,
Flash and patter and breathing ease,
Of stirring earth and stretching trees,
And pools of water, blue in sun.
Spring miracle once more begun!—
And walking under warm blue skies
Warming the eyelids on his eyes
He felt well what it was to be
A seed in all this revelry,

To feel the soil grow warm above,
And rain-drops stealing down like love!
But best of all was knowing this:
That all this was his lover's kiss,
His lover come, in guise of earth,
To justify, for all time, mirth!

So for a flight of magic days
In these ways and in other ways
The reawakened life in him
Woke tunings intricate with whim,—
Slow earthy sequences of tone,
Earth-horns, an under-earth trombone,
A tentative perplexing din;
Whence softly rose a violin
To sing an April phrase, and then
Was lost in jargonings again.
From this confusion, mingling sweet,
It needed but a single beat
Swiftly to draw and lead in one
Those subtle sequences of tone:

Out of the deeps each voice to bring
In waking symphony to sing,
Bidding it quicken, bidding it rise,
Steadfast to shine like stars in skies,
To cry out against all that is,
To shine, to shine with ecstasies,
Till all the stars grew dim thereby,
Its vast wings shadowed all the sky,
Its shadow fell on moon and sun
And sun and moon grew dull and dun,
And all the starry multitude
Were smitten into servitude,
And love's compulsion made them sing
'Our glory grace this marriage ring!'

The sun shot lustre through her hair,
The wind made golden havoc there,
A whirling whiteness was her dress;
O trebled was her loveliness
Upon these hills, beneath this blue,
These dusky cedars walking through!

Along the top of the world they walked
And laughed, and ran, and lightly talked;
The sunlight captured even their words
Making them flash as bright as birds,
Giving the heaviest phrases wing
And bidding simplest words to sing!
Yet, seeing the sunlight on her cheek,
It seemed as if he could not speak,
For all her body shone like wit,
Earth's wit, a grace so exquisite,—
Exquisite laughter, flashing wild,—
That he was tongue-tied, like a child.
O wonderful sunshine of this day,
O wonderful music of this May,
In her they reached their perfect song;
And as she walked so white along,
Whitely and joyously, as in sun
The wonderful sea-waves singing run,
He felt the earth dissolving dim
And slipping out from under him,
And dizzily, dizzily he was borne,

And stone and tree from him were torn,—
Nothing to cling to!—Naught but air . . .
And then the sunshine on her hair,
Her shining eyes, her moving feet,
Her lips that talking moved so sweet,
Her young neck, and the hands she raised
To shade blue eyes from sun that blazed,—
These, in a world that reeled unsure,
Seemed stars to hold to, shone secure . . .
And unapproachable and high
She bent above him like the sky;
And yet, not unapproachable;
For tone and laughter seemed to tell
That though she moved so high and free
Yet she could lean to such as he,
And like the sunlit April skies
Shoot golden laughter through cold eyes . . .
Then through a world of flowering green
She seemed to lean, she seemed to lean,
The whole blue sky seemed bending down,
With swift warm winds about him blown,

He saw her eyes, he saw her cheek,
So close, and yet he could not speak,
But still bent backward, striving still
To meet and break all heaven's will,
To fight this splendor from his face,
To find a little foothold space,
To laugh;—then earth began to swing,
Swiftly his hands flashed out to cling,
And, as it were for one kiss meant,
Towards her mouth his whole soul went,
And warmth and a stillness came
And all his heart was fused with flame.
Earth triumphant, and love declared!
All earth held breath, the lovers stared
Each in the other's laughing eyes,
While quiet music went through skies;
And a blackbird in a cedar swinging
Straight from their own one heart seemed
singing . . .

So wonderful, they stood quite still
While soft sea-wind came up the hill,

Quiet as earth was when she lay
All breathless, waiting the kiss of day;
Quiet as God, when he had made
These stars, and, seeing, was half afraid.
Love was alive once more, and came
Out of the earth like uttered flame
In this sweet body, in this sweet face,
This exquisite, living, laughing grace.
And yet, old love, old faith, he deemed,
Stood firm; for now again it seemed
Her brightness broke from earth, and this
Was their reunion . . . In this kiss
Her soul came back to him again,
After long absence, bitter pain;
Her mouth, her eyes these seemed to be,—
Lo, re-embodied, this was she!—

Earth sang, and trembled; down went sun,
The dark poured out, the day was done . . .
So, in a year's time, triumphed earth,—
This May, as last May, brought him mirth.

YOUTH.

O EARTH, O mother dust, green star of
heaven,

Gay, rapid dancer, lover of the sun,
Thou of his many brides to whom was given
The thrill of life, still starting, never done:
Under whose mother heart warm quickenings
run,

The fires of birth and tremulous ecstasy,
The boon and curse of his fierce love of thee:

O mother dust, so careless of thy young;
Who, still intent upon thy love's bright face,
Know of us only as thy love-song, sung
By thee, to him, passionately, through space;
Bright laughing queen, dancer of silver
grace,

Who, so absorbed in thy sweet dance's moving,
ing,

Care not for us, the children of thy loving,—

Saving that thou must change, from time to
time,

The ageing for the youthful, grey for green,
Lest, in thy love-song, Sun should miss its
chime,

And thou, without thy vesture, seem less
queen:

This cry to thee, out of thy soul, unseen,
One of thy children lifts in desolation,—
Asking to know the cause of his creation,

Asking to know if thou hast heart for him,
And for all these, the children of thy womb,
Who grope, and cry, and call on thee in
hymn,

On whom thou smilest now, now givest
gloom;

Thou scatterest darkness upon seed and
bloom,

And some thou lovest, some thou makest
die:

Therefore one of thy children lifts this cry,

Into the utter darkness of thy being,

Hoping that it may somehow dimly reach,

Cry to thy heart, and bend thy heart to see-
ing

These loveless, motherless children who be-
seech;

So mayest thou then give justice unto each,

Or happiness, maybe; or, if that were pain,

Take back our breaths and give us dark
again.

I.

The surf broke whitely along Coney Beach,

But he was sickened by that shrieking crowd,

So, with a slow strong overhanded reach,
Out for the sea he swam, with head low
bowed;

The June sky shone bright blue, without a
cloud;

Fiercely over the sea the south wind
whipped,

Spray blew, gulls veered, the sea raged in,
white-lipped;

But he was goaded by that roar of throats,
He hated them, they had no strength, no
nerve,

They did not dare to strike beyond the floats,
They clung to ropes . . . While he, with dip
and swerve,

With face turned back, and brown arm's tire-
less curve,

Fought with the sea's alternate fall and rise,
Burst through, shook water out of mouth
and eyes;

Then steadied, with a hard and rhythmic
stroke,
Forged through the glorious tumult of cold
green,
Slid down smooth backs, shot under crests
that broke,
Rose strong again, laughed inwardly, serene;
By god, the real thing, this! He tingled
keen;
True as a knife he flashed in sea and sun,
And laughed for joy to feel the strong blood
run:

To feel his muscles working smooth and
strong,
Beating this senseless force, bitterly beating,
Crushing the sea, his body all one song,
Fierce and sweet, and merciless in defeat-
ing . . .
Slowly the beach's sounds grew faint and
fleeting,

He was alone, exultant, with the sea,
He had flung earth away, his soul was
free . . .

Flung off mankind and all its sordidness,—
Its pettiness, all its cowardice, its greed;
Its timid, sneaking lusts, its bloodlessness,—
Throats that if cut, he thought, could hardly
bleed . . .

He had flung all this off, and he was freed:
Of time and space, and all laws made by
man;
For out, where no tides are, his strong soul
ran.

Wind blew, sun shone, the sea came with a
roar,
White burst and smother of foam, with green
and blue,
Endlessly, rapidly, dizzying towards the
shore

Wave upon wave under the wind they flew;
Sharply above him came the sea-gulls' mew,
He saw their white wings flash, their bodies
 lifting,
The yellow feet held close; he saw them
 drifting

Swiftly and lightly, like a shimmer, away,
Down wind, and wheel,—he saw the keen
 eyes turning . . .

The air came strong, he breathed new life
 to-day,
Each hard breath set his soul more fiercely
 burning;

Life to a furious life in him was yearning;
Youth towered and shone in him, flamed in
 his eyes,
And he rose brightly up in clear bright skies.

By god, the real thing, this!—He turned and
 lay

At ease, rising and falling, breathing deep,
And loved the sky, and looked across the
 bay,—
Over that blue floor watched the black squalls
 sweep,
Filling white sails and making schooners
 leap,
Trailing the thin smoke swiftly from the
 ferry,
Blowing the spray from wave-tops, mad and
 merry . . .

The real thing, this! and all these endless
 days,
These days of senseless drudgery, it was this
That set his soul in fever,—in a craze,—
To break away, to feel the crushing bliss
Of life that wars with life,—the seethe and
 hiss,—
Arm shattering wave, and blind wave smash-
 ing face,

Laughter and shout of wind, and gulls in
race!

The surge washed over him; he lay at ease,
With head thrown back, rising and falling
slow;

And he scorned life, now, as he scorned these
seas,

They fought him hard, but could not over-
throw;

He was the stronger life, and they must go;
Past his cheek went weeds and bubbles
streaming,

Sun flashed, the foam burst white, but he
lay dreaming.

Beauty and strength and youth—he was all
these;

He knew his power; he was the purest life,
Life as it came up out of slimy seas

Æons ago . . . ready and strong for strife,

Armed with a thirst that glittered like a
knife,

A lust for life, for power, a hot clear passion
All earth unto his own heart's peace to fashion . . .

He was all this,—selfish and fierce and
strong,

Hating the weak, and all things he could
beat,

Knowing that strength was right and weakness wrong,

Knowing that death was bitter and life was
sweet,

His days a fruit to crush with hands and
feet;

No hell, no heaven there was, no god or devil,
They were but snares, and snares were good
and evil;

By god, he saw it now! there were no laws,
Not one in nature . . . strength was justice
there,

Every heart for itself with teeth and
claws . . .

But man! he saw man creeping, with sleek
hair,

To kill the strong,—in crowds, it wasn't fair,
They came and snarled and stamped him into
dirt,

Virtuously, for fear his strength might
hurt! . . .

He lashed out with his feet, broke wave with
hands,

Shot green and shimmering through, made
eddies spin,

Fast as the sea he burst towards the sands,
His heart cried out, he felt new life begin,
And like a god he flashed towards the din
Of men and women bickering on the beach;
Seeing the women splashing, screech on
screech,

And fat men basking bellies in the sun,
And sickly city youths who dared not swim,
Who gasped in water and then came out to
run

Self-conscious on the shore, flabby and
slim,—

Turning sly eyes to sleek a woman's limb
Or bit of skin above the stocking gleaming,
Or breast that stood out clear from water
streaming;

Pah, how it sickened him! Swiftly he came,
Caught lightly along in foam, a sea-god
bright,

Flashed through the surf, burst through the
crowd like flame,

Scattered the frightened children left and
right,

Sent a youth spinning, who glowered but
dared not fight,

Ran tingling, roseate, digging toes in sand,

And laughed because girls stared on every
hand . . .

The June dusk came, in Jersey set the sun,
Warm smiling light lay over land and sea;
The tree-tops burned; he saw the sea-gulls
run

Through upper rose-fire, shining, floating,
free;

They made the most of life, and so would
he,—

He mounted wind with them, strong wings
were his,

Earth dropped beneath, he burst where sun-
light is,—

Beat the earth down with dark and angry
wings,

With every wing-beat felt his body lifting,
Lost sound and sight of earth and earthy
things,

High up, triumphant, with a calm wind drifting;
ing;

To watch night rise, and stars through dark
clouds rifting,—

Ah, that was life! and not this dusty sprawling,
ing,

These whimpering creatures in the darkness
crawling!

He looked at all their white suspicious faces,
Hands pale and lean, limp and slavish and
vile,

Insolence born of cowardice, slouching paces,
The crafty glance, insinuating smile . . .

They did not live—they only breathed a
while,

Tortured themselves, prayed, cursed beneath
their breath,

Made a wry smiling face at god,—then
death . . .

Under his feet the electric motors hummed,
The bright train sped through night, a living
thing;

The poles whipped past; rhythmic, the rail-
frogs drummed;

Lights flashed and vanished by as if on
wing;

This too was life, this speed! He heard it
sing,

And there was power in it, and ecstasy,
Its exultation set his spirit free . . .

And when at last he lay that night in bed,
Tired deliciously, athirst for sleep,
All this new music triumphed in his head,
A thousand voices, shrill and sweet and deep;
In a vast cosmic ring he felt it sweep,
Like a great tide of stars he felt it run,
And he among them, round some blinding
sun;

He heard the people passing in the street,—
The slow steps on the pavement rang out
clear;

He heard his watch tick, musically sweet;
A drunkard sang,—then silence, like a fear;
Then, like a fairy voice from some far
sphere,

Came the slow bells from Metropolitan
Tower,

Now near, now far, the quarters and then
the hour;

Trolling out sweetly now, now fading far,
Then the deep solemn voice, twelve times it
spoke,

And then the quiet . . . he lay and watched
a star

Which dimmed and shone through blowing
chimney-smoke;

So earth went on . . . But in him something
broke,

An exquisite breaking, shot with fire of pain,
Something was born in him, and something
slain;

He stared wild-eyed, lay mute, then laughed
a second,

Drunken with wine of youth; and he knew
now

That times had changed for good, that life
had beckoned,

That he must go and live, he cared not
how,—

Only to fight, take, kill, and never bow:

Stake all, win all, lose all,—what mattered
this?

Fighting for life, even to die were bliss!

II.

Weeks passed, a whirl of lights and sound
and laughter,

A fever dream, vertiginous, roaring, mad,
He quit his job, not caring what came after,
And struck out blindly; money enough he
had,

And life, by Christ, would go now as he
bade;

He got it by the throat, he was its master;
Sing! went his whip, and life danced on the
faster.

He drank, he cursed, he flung the world off
spinning,

He fought three times, a girl the cause each
time,

He broke Jake Franz's jaw to stop him
grinning,

Whirled stars about his head and made them
chime;

He got in with a gang whose work was crime,
Helped crack a jewelry store, then half killed

one

Who called him cheat at cards, and pulled a
gun . . .

At the stage doors he met with murmured
curses,

He waltzed the queens away, he had his will;
He laughed to see the sports look black as
hearses,

White blooded things! Did they have hands,
to kill?

Touch of soft fingers on him made him thrill,
He strode, his nostrils quivered stiff with
scorn,

He wondered why these little men were
born . . .

He waltzed the queens away,—his smile, his
voice,

The youth that sang like music through his
veins,—

They laughed and clung to him, they had no
choice,

He was a love-song full of witching strains;
He danced them out of the world of work
and pains,

Girl after girl, white arms came gladly after,
The music drew, he danced them off with
laughter.

He did not love them,—they were shining
dust,

Speciously bright soft wonders filled with
lies,

Timid and insolent, rotten with fawning lust,
Foolish, with no more depth than peacocks'-
eyes;

They lusted after him, to make him prize,
To hold his body or even to take his soul—
He smiled, they wept and cursed, but he kept
whole.

One after one he tempted, drew, eluded,
Smiled upon, only to show more keen his
hate,

Boldly into their dusty hearts intruded;
He bade them know themselves, he came like
fate;

They loved him? But they loved, he said,
too late,—

Their life burned out; they should have
thought of this!

Scornful, on pale lips then, a farewell kiss.

Youth yearns to youth, full blood loves full
blood only,

He was too bright, too masterful, too keen,
He was too good for these, so he stood lonely,
A lonely king waiting the lonely queen;
An unsurpassable fire, unknown, unseen,
Impalpable dream, the warm bright mist of
life,

Music, white stars; so dreamed he of a
wife . . .

A wife? A mistress rather . . . he would
not wed:

That was to stoop in chains, renounce his
wings,

Break body and heart and soul for daily
bread,

Get down and crawl among all crawling
things!

Life is not life that only day's work brings!

Crush, master, show no mercy, take, not
give—

No god save self, that is the way to live . . .

He walked Sixth Avenue, the night was fine;
And strangely, then, a doubt came, like a
flame;

Was this way life?—He quenched the doubt
in wine,

Walked lightly out . . . In crowds the har-
lots came,

They laughed, they sang, they moved so free
from shame,

So frank in lust! These creatures knew life's
taste,

They danced it night and day, no hour to
waste . . .

They danced,—for what was living but a
dance?—

Until they sank down whitely to the floor,
Their rioting done,—seeing in that last
glance,

New youth come laughing through the burst-
ing door,

New eyes to shine,—new dancers evermore,—
And this same savage, passionate music
played:

Still the same music, though the dancers
fade.

Doubt turned in him . . . only a moment's
space . . .

Was life best so? Where was the fight in
this?

Night-fears! . . . He knew a girl, she was
fair of face,

She had soft hair, her mouth was cool to
kiss;

And she could dance, and dancing would be
bliss . . .

'Us for the music, kid, there's ragtime play-
ing!

A night of nights!'—She laughed, with no
gainsaying . . .

'Only, I hope my Jake Franz won't be there—
Poor Jake! he loves me . . . and he might
be jealous;

And then, besides, you hit him one,—for
fair;

He has been blowing round me like a bel-
lows,

These last two weeks;—you know, these
love-sick fellows,—

Well, you can't say!—O mother,—hold me,
honey!

Doesn't this music make your feet feel
funny!'

The music wailed,—sinuous, drawling,
svelt,—

Languid, impassioned, a living and beating
thing,—

Girls closed their eyes and let their bodies
melt,

The men laughed strangely, held them close
to swing;

There were tense movements, tense as cry-
ing string,

Short vibrant steps, quivering stiff with pas-
sion,

Body to body yearning, stripped of fashion;

Short breaths, arms held out straight, a
subtle swaying,—

Sometimes a girl, with music almost crazed,
Wailed a few bars; and all the musicians
playing

Leaned to their bows a little, like men half
dazed . . .

Women were drunk with it, their skirts they
raised,

They showed their knees,—frantic they were,
to tear

These husks away and leave bright bodies
bare . . .

Frantic, in one fierce effort to be released,
To loose their souls from centuries of re-
straint,

They gave themselves,—until the music
ceased,—

Then staggered back to benches, flushed and
faint;

They had forgotten puff and powder and
paint,
They were but creatures drunken with mad
moving,
Drugged with the body's lust, the body's
loving.

Jim and his girl sat at a table drinking,
Watching the dancers in a haze of smoke.
And, as he watched them, back that doubt
came slinking,
It seemed as if some voice within him spoke;
What was this life? A laugh, a smutty
joke,—
A drink, a giddy step, a dance, a kiss,—
Then the long darkness of the last abyss.

This was not living, but a mad decay,
Shining in darkness, like all things that rot,—
A whore-house ball, garish and grim by day,
Lifeless and sallow and sad, a desolate spot;

Where was the music now? It answered not;
Shutters were drawn, closed like the eyes of
 death,
Smell of dead roses came, a febrile
 breath . . .

Well, he would quit—this night would be his
 last.

What he would do he could not say as yet;—
He drank, May talked; before his mind's eye
 passed

A host of things . . . the Amazon,—Tibet,—
Africa . . . There, exploring, he might for-
 get

These effete countries swarmed with maggot
 man,—

Masterful, where great winds, great rivers
 ran . . .

Honduras, Hayti,—rebellions every day;
He might be king—or fly-blown in a ditch;

Imperial Cæsar dead and turned to
clay! . . .

Turn socialist? Pah, no,—it made him
itch,—

Sick, scabrous dogs! . . . Christ no, not
that! . . . But which?

He did not know; he smiled, May talked to
him,

The smoke hung round the dancers, wreath-
ing dim.

He heard and answered, with a dreamy smile,
May's smutty talk,—she pressed his knee
with hers;

Why not clear out to mountains for a
while,—

Breathe pure air sweetened by the pines and
firs,

Where blue-jay screeches and the swift hawk
whirs,—

Why not? . . . By god, he would! He'd go
next day;
And at the thought he laughed and kissed
this May.

They danced again; the music, like a sea,
Swept them away, as blind and light as foam,
They leapt to stars, wind bore them high
and free,
They whirled, they laughed, May clutched a
flying comb . . .
The music stopped . . . Jim stared: 'I'm
going home;
I'm tired of you,—and all this rutting
crowd—!
I'm quit.'—He smiled, sarcastic, stiffly
bowed . . .

And stalked away, seeing Jake Franz look
sour,
Pull down his waistcoat with elaborate care,

Smile subtly to himself, adjust a flower,
Pass one palm lightly over oily hair . . .
Jim kissed his hand to him . . . Thank god,
 fresh air!

He drew deep breaths, fair from the sea it
 came,

He filled his heart with new life like a flame.

Where were the stars? Ah, he remembered,
 then:

Above Fifth Avenue there are no stars;
They have been banished by the lights of
 men,

Theatre-lights, electric signs, bazars,
Cafés and Lobster-houses, glorious bars;
Well, he was quit of this, perhaps for good;
He yearned for mountains, valleys, field and
 wood . . .

Where you could see the sun rise bright
 through trees,

Slanting his glamour over mountain-tops,

Touching the waves of forests broad as seas,
Taking the flash of dew from field and copse;
There in the pines a ghost-wind never stops,
And stars shine down at night through frosty
air;

He could scorn man, see truth, he thought,
from there . . .

Yes! He would see life clear from windy
heights,

Find a new path . . . In this place who
could see?

A maze of sweating days and feverish nights,
Imploring hands and mouths, a drunken glee,
Oaths and despair,—abysmal misery;

He would go out . . . and then would find a
way.

He was aloft and walked in dawn of day.

Up a dark street he turned, deserted, quiet . . .

He mused . . . then suddenly, vaguely, he
became

Aware as of some shadow . . . His heart ran
riot,

Jake Franz stood black . . . 'By Jesus, it's a
shame

The way you treat my girl! Say, what's
your game?

What do you think I am, you swill-pail cat!
You think I'll eat your leavings? . . . Tell
me that!

Speak up, my boy! Things have to be ex-
plained.'

—Nonchalant, sneering, then, he flicked
Jim's chin;

Jim raged, lights ran, he struck out, some-
thing pained,

In Jake's hand flashed a knife-blade, long
and thin;

Then Jake dropped downward, darkly, like a
sin,

Out of the universe, silent as wind it seemed,

Lost in the bottomless darkness, only
dreamed . . .

Jim stood above him, staring . . . Where
had he gone?

Ah, he was there . . . 'Get up, you fool!' he
said,

He kicked him twice; vague pains went
gleaming on,

There in his side,—he felt it wet, he bled . . .

No use though, as he knew: the man was
dead,

Dead as the stone beneath him . . . He felt
pain . . .

Angry, 'Get up, you fool!' he said again . . .

He kicked the shape once more, then bending
down

Scanned the white face, the thin jaw crushed
aside,

The eyebrows puckered in a puzzled
frown . . .

‘Dead as the dust!’ Jim smiled. A wave of
pride

Surged redly up in him, he beamed, wide-
eyed;

Then somewhat peevish, stumblingly, he
turned,

And walked off, slowly,—for his side still
burned . . .

He washed his cut, changed clothes, and took
a train;

Wound his watch carefully, and heard it
tick

Faintly beneath his pillow . . . *Damn* that
pain . . .

He tossed a bit, heard sleepers breathing
thick,—

With clouded passion prayed that train be
quick;

Lifting the shade he saw black woods go by,
Bright sea . . . dark farm . . . a cold moon
in the sky . . .

III.

Up the green valley filled with sun he walked,
The mountains dreamed in quiet round the
sky,
The cold brook, flashing down, half sang,
half talked,
Trees shook; and in blue heaven, frail and
high,
Like a last flurry of snow went cirrus by;
The forests rose above him, burned or green,
Bare rocky summits glowed in sun, serene.

Earth!—The strong mother, bitter and un-
kind,
Savagely laughing from her lover's kiss,
Tender, voluptuous, hard, unmerciful,
blind,—

Earth, his fierce mother, he knew revealed
in this;

Up the green road he walked, his heart was
bliss,

Savagely laughing back, a bitter mirth;
Earth did not care for him, nor he for
earth . . .

Out of her rocks, her mountains, wind and
rain,

Lightning and cold and ice, at kiss of sun
She gave his body birth and felt no pain;
Torpid she lay, she felt no hot blood run,
Smiled at her lord, nor knew what she had
done;

Life was her smile to sun, her song of
praise. . .

He had no debt, then, he would go his
ways . . .

Yes, go his ways, be true to her, her child,—
Merciless, hard, voluptuous, soft as dust;

Leave life unchecked in him, be clean and
wild,

Fashion his days with strong hands, wreak
his lust . . .

Youth was a knife, he would not let it rust!—
But cut with it, cut merciless to the core;
Life sharpens, fighting life, and lives the
more . . .

He had known what it was to seize and kill,
To crush with hands, to feel the hot blood
hum;

Stamped dust in dust, and known the savage
thrill

Thick in his heart, a laughter in him, dumb;
Shining he rose from that—now let life
come,—

Legioned in dark, he had the strength to
meet it,

Let a vast angry world come, he would beat
it!

He found a farm, midway from town to
town,

Blake's farm; old Blake was looking for a
man;

A gentle soul, his face was seamed and
brown,

Grief-struck it seemed, inscrutable to scan;

His wife had run away, so rumor ran;

He talked in whispers, held a pail of water:

Jim took the job because he saw Blake's
daughter . . .

Walking towards them, tall and sweet she
came,

Lightly over the grass, as blossom snowing,
Jim's eyes flared up, he thought 'By god, fair
game!'

And watched her keen . . . Her soft white
dress was blowing,

Softly, a little, a glimpse of stocking show-
ing;

Three daisies shone like stars in her dark
hair,

Her eyes were deep, her brown slim neck was
bare.

Her soft dress blowing made a rustling
sound;

Rhythmic she came; over her quiet face
The wind blew strays of hair, she slightly
frowned,

An absent gesture brushed them back in
place;

April she was,—she came with April's grace,
Into his heart she came, softly as fire,
And in his eyes rose lightnings of desire.

She was the earth that's gentle, smiles in
sun,

The soft green earth of spring, the hush of
spring,

Young earth in whom have hardly yet begun

The blossom-fires that snow and burn and
sing:

Youthful and grave, a wise and shining thing,
Unscathed by knowledge, therefore trebly
wise,

Unburned by passion yet, with undimmed
eyes.

‘The new man, Jane; just show him round
the farm;’

The old man whispered; Jane’s face lighted
then,

She smiled to Jim, her soul faced his soul,
calm,

She had the frank straightforwardness of
men.

She led him round, showed pasture, fallows,
pen,

The apple orchard, full of grey old trees,
The barn, a poultry-yard, some hives of
bees . . .

Jim saw, but saw not; hungrily he listened
Lest he should miss her voice's slightest
word,

Sweetly she spoke, and, hearing, Jim's eyes
glistened,

Never before so sweet a voice he'd heard;
It bubbled, it broke in spray, like song of
bird;

Like living waters that through a spring
wood run,

A quiet glee, a flashing in warm sun.

Into his soul like song of fire it went,
Warm tremulous music, strangely bringing
power,

An April stir, an innocent blandishment,
The spring blood pushing blindly out in
flower . . .

What was this change, the magic of an hour?
He yearned to reach out arms to her and
take her,

She was so sweet! To crush, to bruise, to
break her . . .

She was so soft, so bright, so star-like pure,
She walked beside him there so frank and
free,

Buoyantly quiet, smiling, always sure;
He watched her long, light step, the moving
knee

Rippling the soft white dress so gracefully;
Fair game, by god! A savage strength in
him

Sang to his finger-tips, his eyes swam dim . . .

Quiet, 'You must be lonely here!' he said,—
'Here all alone with mountains and with
sky . . .'

They talked a space, with often turning head,
Each frankly pleased to have that other
by . . .

He thought, 'It won't be hard, she isn't
shy,—

Two weeks, I'll have her!'—Glancing down,
he smiled,

Thinking her 'half a woman, half a child' . . .

They saw the farm,—it was a pleasant place,
Hard by a wood that sloped up to a hill,—
The brook between; below there was a race,
And when the wind came up you heard the
mill;

At night you'd hear the woods, it was so
still:

Jim lay awake, hearing soft sough of leaves,
The woods asleep, birds rustling in the
eaves . . .

And brook went droning downward, still the
same,

Soft as a dream . . . grey as the woof of
sleep . . .

Then, in his mind, her face came, bright as
flame,

He saw her smiling, saw her eyes grow deep ;
He heard her speaking, saw her gesture
sweep

Over the deep fields, valley, shining hills,
Clover, and sun-flash on high mountain-
rills . . .

Wild-carrot tossing whitely over meadows,
Brown fallow, shining glossy from the
plough,
Over the fields, flying, went blue cloud-shad-
ows,—

Dimly, as if through water . . . All this,
now,

Came keenly, with a breath of balsam bough
Fresh from the woods . . . And he could see
her face,

Quiet and calm, sweet spirit of this place . . .

Yes, it was calm, a shallow in life's river,
Gently it moved, and lingered much in
sun . . .

He could stay here in languid ease forever,
Not looking outward where swift waters
run;

No, though! He must get out, the fight was
fun;

He would stay here till murder-fuss was
over,

Laze here a while, and dream things out, in
clover . . .

Ah! and for Jane!—his eyes stared wide
through night,

As if they saw her beauty somewhere there,
Walking so lithely through the sun's kind
light . . .

His body yearned to hers, for she was fair,
Young, with young eyes, soft skin, and dark
soft hair;—

Youth yearns to youth, full blood loves full
blood only,
She would be mirth, his stay would not be
lonely . . .

Only a while, he thought, only a while,—
He must go back to the dark world of
men . . .

He would but stay a summer, kiss her smile,
Drink laughter from her bubbling mouth,
and then,—

Well, she was nothing more! go back
again . . .

He laughed at her . . . his dreams made
vaguer riot . . .

Sleep-webs came floating down, and he lay
quiet.

IV.

Out through the fields they walked when
work was done;

Like bright quick thoughts a month of days
had passed;

Time was but interchange of dark and sun,
Clouds piled and massed and vanished, piled
and massed;

Dawn after dawn the patient spiders cast
New gossamers on the grass to flash with
dew;

The crows cawed harsh; red-tasselled the tall
corn grew.

The pumpkins glowed like fire among dark
vines,

Over wide fields danced myriad golden-rod,
Yellowing earth; then came bright flash of
tines,

The hay-forks tossed, scythe swished, and old
Blake trod

Sadly and slowly, whispering thanks to God,
And praying God to give three fine days
more,—

Three days of sun, to take in winter's
store . . .

A month of days . . . Jim worked, he sang
them by,

Blew them off, soft as dandelion greys;

For Jane was there, like full moon in the
sky,

Jane, with her voice, her smile, her quiet
ways;

Watching him work with wise and musing
gaze,

Talking so wisely, brushing back stray hair,
Or broidering all day, quick, with soft arms
bare.

'By god, I'll have her yet! Fool that I am!'

Jim rested back from hoeing, spat, changed
grip,

Thought he was faint of will,—not worth a
damn;

He frowned: how had he let so much time
slip?

He, the ring-master,—where now was his
whip?

Youth rose rebellious, savage flashed his hoe;
By god, to-night! The time had come to go.

The time had come: he must get back again,
Where there was life, and fighting, blood to
spill,

He would walk strong and scornful among
men,

Take power from them, be master, wreak his
will;

He had known what it was to crush and
kill—

He knew his strength; if he were killed in-
stead,—

Well, he lived only once, but once was dead!

Life must be rich in deeds: it did not matter

If they were crime, so long as they were
brave;

Let others make, it was his work to shatter,
His work to take and spend, let others save;
Life walked but once this night-road to the
grave—

Ah, let it dance, then, sing, storm heights of
power;

Savage and swift, crush life from every
hour! . . .

.

‘Come for a walk, Jane, there’s a new moon
shining,

Bright through the firs . . . We’ll go,—I
know a place . . .’

Through the warm dark they stepped; a dog
was whining;

The wind came faintly up, they heard the
race;

He looked and saw the starlight on her face,

And his heart pained him, loudly beating,
beating;

The fir-cones dropped, they walked; and time
was fleeting.

The new moon swam through fir-tops, hid
and shone,

The trees made sounds in sleep . . . or
sounds in dream . . .

As if they dreamed of life long dead and
gone.

At edge of wood, a soft slope down to stream,
Dark, was a clover bed;—with whir and
gleam

The big bees hung and hummed there in
warm noon;

Sweetly it slept, now, drowsed by brook's
slow tune . . .

'Here is my place . . . It is so soft, in
clover . . .

So sweet . . . I'm sure the bees sleep here at
night! . . .'

She laughed a while with him; O laugh of
lover,

That cries so deep and dark, that sings so
light!

They laughed a while, moon made their faces
white,

He saw her white hands moving at her
throat,

Clasping a brooch . . . On wind they seemed
to float,—

Over the forest-tops, his heart was burning,
Touching the leaves, softer than dream they
were . . .

Her dress shone pale, and all his soul went
yearning

To feel that whiteness, kiss, and capture her;
Out of the woods came soft a still-and-stir,

They hardly breathed, dared not turn face
to face;

Their hearts beat loudly in that sleeping
place.

‘Jane, there is something . . .’ Speech was
caught from him,

Fire surged up in him, filled throat and eyes,
‘I love you, Jane . . .’ ‘O, and I love *you*,
Jim—!’

The words had burst and paled, and they
were wise;

But they sat still, they watched the glorious
skies,

All the world’s beauty through that darkness
came,

Jane’s breath broke sharply, Jim hung head
in shame . . .

Her face was white with moonlight, her eyes
deep,

Her eyes closed slowly, feeling his warm kiss,
Her softness came around his heart like
sleep,

Through all his veins she went, a singing
bliss;

Through all his veins, with fire and seethe
and hiss,

Like blossom-fires of spring her body went,
He closed his eyes and knew now what life
meant;

This was life's flower, life meant no more
than this:

His mouth at her mouth, giving breath and
taking,

Body and soul surrendered in one kiss,
The soul on fire within, the body shaking;
Life had been dream before, now came his
waking,

She in his arms, her quick breath on his
cheek,

Her soft hair falling, hearts too full to speak.

Life had been dream! His heart was loud
with crying,
To think how frantic, foolish he had been,
Frantic in darkness, shouting, hitting, lying,
Feeling this power but turning it to sin;
That was all dreamed; he felt new life begin,
And a last passionate grief shook darkly
through him
Lest this new wonder tame, unman, undo
him . . .

‘Jane, you’re the stars, the suns, the moons of
heaven,
And all the beauty and strength and height
and fire,
The glory and power for which I’ve blindly
striven,
Not knowing my aim, not knowing my own
desire . . .’
He kissed her throat, they watched the moon
climb higher,

And the stars marching, marching, never
stopping;

The brook droned on, they heard the fir-
cones dropping;

The moonlight made soft silver of the clover,
Tremulous in warm wind . . . Face close to
face,

They saw this dark sweet world as love and
lover,

They were the soul of night and of this place;
Darkly through deep eyes they went out
through space,

Timeless, eternal, mingling the near and far,
Changing from life to dream, from earth to
star . . .

Feeling the dream turn earth beneath their
feet,

Feeling the star turn human in their hands,
In darkness finding dark eyes deep and sweet,

And a warm human face in firebrands . . .
Love's magic only a lover understands,
Magic and magian, he is both in one,
Shrinking to speck, dilating huge as sun . . .

Up from the valley's dark, two miles below,
The light wind brought a fading sound of
bells,
The church clock struck the hour, sweet and
slow,
Some notes they missed, some came with the
wind's swells;
The wind came soft, sweet with the soft
night smells,
Meadow and pines, and dew on new-mown
grass;
So time passes, so even earth must pass . . .

Out of the clover then the lovers rose.
Moved arm in arm, like ghosts; Jim gazed
at Jane,

And thought he walked on giddy heights of
snows,

Or breathed star-fire . . . so sweet it was,
'twas pain;

And they must stop to kiss, and kiss again,
And touch with hands, and laugh, and walk
on slowly,

Through the moon's light that lay so still
and holy . . .

'Good-night!'—Mouth fed on mouth, eyes
closed with yearning,

Body to body quivered and then stood still,
And the hearts paused, and the blood ceased
its burning,

To hear the music of one perfect will . . .

A long while then, leaning on window-sill,
Jim stared at night; he felt a great calm
spread

Wide in his soul . . . as if his youth were
dead . . .

As if all strength, all fierceness, lust for life,
The mad thirst, body's trembling greed for
power,

His love of war, the glittering of the knife,—
Faded, dislimned, all vanished in this hour.

A sadness drooped his spirit . . . Would he
cower,—

Dream life away?—Well, maybe dream was
best,

Dream, and the long slow years of calm and
rest . . .

No feverish search through the mad universe,
Fighting to crush the small and kill the
strong,—

Where was the good in that? That life was
curse;

He would live calmly, usefully, and long,
Plough earth, sow corn, make life a pastoral
song,

Take fill of love, and peace, and quiet mirth,

Close to the calm heart of his mother,
Earth . . .

Long while Jim dreamed here, looking out at
night,

Till elbows ached from leaning, eyes were
strained;

But then Jane's face came back so sweet, so
white,

In the moon's pale,—and slow this trouble
waned . . .

The waters roared far out, he yearned, he
pained,—

New youth would fight them . . . Here they
ran, not deep,

But calmly, smooth in sunlight, calm as
sleep.

He would stay here untroubled by life's
sound,

Through years to come he saw, year beyond
year;

He would stay here, go this life's quiet round,
He saw himself grow old, still ploughing
here . . .

So in his love he dreamed,—stirred by no
fear

That life was useless, useless age and youth,
Sorrow and joy . . . Love touched him,
veiled the truth:

And life made slave of him . . . Meanwhile,
the earth

Still through the starlight danced her endless
song,

Turning her lord's love to slow death and
birth,

Still changing grey for green, the weak for
strong;

Life's cry she heard not, knew not right or
wrong;

Youth rose, youth fell; she smiled to sun,
danced on,
Smiling the same smile, dancing, dawn to
dawn.

ROMANCE.

THE last farewells were said, friends hurried
ashore,—

The screw threshed foam, and jarred; the
pier slid by;

Hands went to ears to still the siren's roar,
Handkerchiefs waved, and there was call and
cry;

Over it all, austere and pure and high,
Glittering snow and gold, the towers looked
down,—

Serene and cold, regardless of the town.

The wind blew north; and gravely on it came
The trolling of the Metropolitan bells,
First the four chimes, softly as puffs of flame,
Then the deep five . . . Slow, gentle, gleam-
ing swells

Came glancing in the sun, with ocean smells,
Up from the harbor and the further sea;
Over the stern poised white gulls, giddily.

Over the stern they poised and dipped and
glanced,

Now dull in shade, now shining in bright
sun,

And one youth watched them as they whirled
and danced,

And noticed how they circled, one by one;
To have those wings, that freedom,—God,
what fun!—

And watching them he felt youth in him,
strong,

Wings in his blood, and in his heart a song.

Autumn! Already now the keen wind
nipped,

The skies arched cold bright blue, the leaves
were turning;

Whitely over the waves the cold squalls
 whipped;
Scarlet and pale, the maple trees were burn-
 ing,
Tossing in gusts, and whirling and returning,
On Staten Island, wonderfully afire;
In bacchic song they flamed, with mad de-
 sire.

Autumn! bringing to old adventures death,
Sadness at all things past, things passing
 still,
Touching all earth with strange and mystic
 breath,
Veiling all earth in fire ere winter kill;
Even this youth felt now his deep heart fill
With a grey tide of mystery and sadness,
Poignant sorrow for all past hours of glad-
 ness . . .

Those times—would others come as keen as
 they?

Was life to come as living as life past?—

Ah, he was youth, life could not say him
nay,—

The blood sang swift in him, doubt could not
last;

Let all life dead beneath his feet be cast
And he would trample it, divinely singing:
Life lay before, more rapturous music bring-
ing!

More lusts, more shining eyes, more dizzy
laughter,

More, madder music, flute and violin,
With drums before and roses showered after,
Always in new bliss drowning his old sin;
Sin?—Was it that?—And straight in merry
din

Of song and shout and laugh this thought
was lost;

It was no sin to live, whate'er the cost! . . .

High overhead the Brooklyn bridges passed,
Span upon span and rumorous with cars,
Their shadows on the deck a moment cast,
With dizzy thunder from their traffic's wars;
Those grey stone piers would soon be
crowned with stars,—

Even now their brows were soft with waning
sun;

The homeward march of armies was begun.

Good-bye, old bridges! And New York,
good-bye!

Northward the engines took him; now no
more

His gaze hung here; he watched the western
sky

Blazing with vision-isles and faery shore;
Northward the vibrant ship beneath him
bore;

The Sound spread out before them, wide and
blue,

Clean came the wind whereon the sea-gulls
flew . . .

Soft fields, the flaming trees, a twilight
farm . . .

New York was gone. He drew deep breaths
of air,

Keen as keen fire it was; then slow and calm,
He turned to walk . . . when lo, a girl came
there,

Deep sunset in her eyes and on her hair,
Her white dress clinging to her knees, one
hand

Rising to shade her blue eyes; as she scanned

The swiftly gliding shore, the passing ships,
The bell-buoys, bobbing and tolling in the
tide . . .

A moment, breath hung lifeless on his lips,
His heart froze quiet; no one was at her
side;

Faintly, he smiled; he thought her eyes replied,

Remote lights meeting in them,—quicken-
ing;

He passed, and all his body seemed to
sing . . .

He passed, then turned; and, as he turned,
she turned,—

Her eyes met his eyes shyly, then again

She looked away, and all her soft face
burned,

And all her virgin heart was big with pain.

From the saloon below came soft a strain

Of some new rag-time, bidding feet to move,
Imploring hands to cling, young hearts to
love . . .

Sweetly it came, seductive, soft, bizarre,

Huddled and breathless now, now note by
note

Crying its separate pain . . . now near, now
far . . .

Mingled with all the throbbing of the boat.
How beautiful! the first star came, to float
Impalpable in dusk, low in the east;
It seemed to sing on when the music ceased.

Herald of love, lo, love itself it seemed,
Singing into the twilight of her soul . . .
How beautiful! . . . across dark waters
gleamed

Red lights and green, she heard a bell-buoy
toll

Suddenly caught in the after-wash's roll;
A smell of autumn fires came down the wind;
Beauty so keen it seemed it must have
sinned . . .

What was this night, what did it bring to
her,

What flower unfolded in its darkness now?

She was this night; she felt her deep soul
stir,

The slow strange stir of blossoms in the
bough . . .

How beautiful! She watched the forefoot
plough

Sheer through the foaming black, the white
waves gliding

Dizzily past, now swelling, now subsiding . . .

O Youth, O music, O sweet wizardry
Of young life sung like fire through beating
veins!

O covering darkness and persuasive sea!

O night of stars, of blisses and of pains!

But most, O Youth, that but an hour re-
mains,—

Be fierce, be sweet with us before you go;

For, knowing you, the best of life we know.

Enchanted so she watched dark waters slip-
ping

Swiftly and dizzily past the sheer black side,
Watched the fierce wind in sudden flurries
whipping

The torn spray from the waves, against the
tide;

High among stars she saw the mast-head
glide,—

Steadily now, now swinging slowly, slightly,
There the high mast-head lantern burning
brightly . . .

O Youth, O music, O sweet wizardry,—
O covering darkness of mysterious night!—
She turned; along the dark deck, quietly,
He came again; an open door shed light
Strongly across him for a space, then fright
Suddenly set her wild heart beating, beat-
ing,—

Suddenly set her endlessly repeating

‘I mustn’t speak! I mustn’t speak!’—And
then

He stood beside her, close and warm and
strong,

And she knew sudden the beauty that's in
men,

And all her blood flew musical with song . . .

'—Beautiful, isn't it.—Have you known it
long?'—

Calmly he looked at her, and gently spoke.

She nodded, lightly; then the warm words
broke

Easily, quickly, fervently from her heart,

All the restraint of all her youth was gone,

She felt a thousand warm new instincts start

Out of her soul, birds taking wing with dawn,

Singing their hearts out . . . With a deep
breath drawn,

'Yes! I've known it for years, and loved it,
too;

Beautiful!—This—is this the first for you?'

They talked, in low tones; and the sound of
sea,

Falling of foam and swish of dropping spray,
Encircled them with song, incessantly;—

They felt alone, the world seemed far away.

They two! they two! so seemed the night to
say;

A darkness and a stealing fragrance came
Spreading through all their souls, silent as
flame . . .

O beauty of being a living thing, she
thought,—

Of drawing breath beneath these stars, this
sky!—

O beautiful fire that from his eyes she caught,
That made her breath rise quick, her lips
burn dry!

What was this thing? Dread came, she
scarce knew why,—

Impulsively she went; yet she had given

Her word to dine with him, her earth was
heaven.

He watched her go, and smiled,—her white
dress blowing

Softly in dark,—so young, so sweet, so brave!

She was so pure! by God, there was no know-
ing,—

And he had half a mind, still, to behave . . .

No, though: far better take what fortune
gave,—

Dance to the music that was played for him;
Smiling he mused of her, his eyes grew dim,—

And he could feel her warmth by his side,

And all his body flushed with sweet desire

To take her shining loveliness for bride,

To kiss, to fuse with her in single fire . . .

O youth, O young heart musical as a lyre!

O covering darkness of mysterious night!

He knew these things; his heart was filled
with light . . .

What was one more? Pah, how he scorned
this qualm!

Innocent? Such girls seem—but never are.

No, he was not her first . . . And cold and
calm

He turned and sought the brightly-lighted
bar . . .

The music rose, through shut doors, faint and
far,

Wailful . . . Down in her stateroom mirror
there

A young girl eyed herself, with frightened
stare.

II.

She eyed herself with quick breath, fright-
ened stare,

The fingers of one hand caught at her throat,
And half unconsciously she smoothed her
hair . . .

The music called to her, bizarre, remote . . .
On a vast hurrying tide she seemed afloat,
Hurrying through a darkness downward ever,
Starless, along some subterranean river . . .

Where was she going? Where was the cur-
rent taking?

Vaguely she knew that it would lead to pain,
To a dark endless pain her deep heart break-
ing,

To a grey world forever dulled with rain . . .
And yet she knew this would not come again,
And all the sweet bliss came imploring, plead-
ing,

Melting her soul, bruising her heart to bleed-
ing . . .

O God, she did not know!—Yet future sor-
row

Seemed somehow paid for by this instant
bliss,

A brief to-day was worth a long to-morrow;
O youth, O night,—this joy she dared not
miss!

Her whole soul yearned for this young lover's
kiss,

Though it be paid for through eternity.
O, had not God designed this thing to be?

Was not her mouth for this young mouth in-
tended,

Since all her living body told her so?

Was it not preordained that so be ended

A girlhood colder than December snow?

A starlight kiss—she need no further go—:

His warm hands touching hers: O was this
sin?

Just this?—She shut her eyes to fires with-
in . . .

To those fierce central fires she closed her
eyes,

Yet dimly of their passion was aware,
And felt their flames like drunkenness arise
Whirling her soul, making life strangely
fair . . .

She eyed herself with held breath, frightened
stare . . .

Alas, was it the alchemy of sin
That made her lovelier far than e'er she'd
been?

Plausibly sweet the music came to her,
Through many doors, most plausible and
sweet,

Setting some subtle pulse in her astir,
Smoothing in song her heart's erratic beat.
Dizziness came, unstrung her knees, her feet,
And she sank down a space upon her bed,
Shutting her eyes, mad reelings in her head.

How would this end? And would her whole
life change,

Swayed by this mastering sun as sways the
moon?

Would all her way of life be new and strange,
Her friends be lost, her kin desert her soon?

Passion surged up in her, and in its swoon
These doubts were swept aside, obscure and
fleeting;

Somewhere she heard a beating . . . beating
. . . beating . . .

Was it her heart, the loud pulse in her ear,
Or music, some recurring undertone?—

The drums perhaps . . . She raised her head
to hear,

The beating ceased . . . Only the tireless
drone

Of toiling engines, and the sea's hushed moan
Soft through the fast-shut port . . . and
that was all.

Steps passed and re-passed down the muffled
hall.

Steps passed and re-passed on the deck above
Ringing like iron . . . The curtains by her
bed

Quivered forever to the engine's move,
And from the lamp a quivering light was
shed.

These senseless things, when all her life was
dead,

Would still go on: steps pass, the curtains
quiver,

These things or others,—they would last for-
ever.

Quickly she rose, and in the mirror's shine
Looked at herself a quiet moment's space;
It was as if the earth's autumnal wine
Had touched her soul,—her body had a grace
That passing life has, lovely was her face

With a strange loveliness, and in her eyes
Was the deep glory of October skies.

She was alive! her blood flew warm and
young;

No more than this she knew, that she was
fair;

And happiness through her deep heart was
sung,

Passionate joy as light as flame in air;

O youth! O love, oblivious of all care!

O lithe swift-blooded youth, O rose of earth,

O warm-eyed loveliness of fragrant mirth!—

Giddy, with whirling thoughts, she left her
room;

And down the corridor, with fainting feet,
Lightly she went, caught onward to sweet
doom,

And only heard her heart's loud tremulous
beat;

Through opening doors, most plausible, most
sweet,

The music rose to her; and he stood there,
Smiling, in all that noise and whir and
glare . . .

Over the shining silver, sparkling glass,
The smooth white table-cloth, he leaned and
smiled;

The whole world vanished, they were lad and
lass,

In love, and face to face, hearts running wild.
Deep in her eyes he looked: O what a child!
Her soft breast rose and fell, her throat's pure
white

Beat with a little pulse of joy and fright.

No need to talk . . . For in their eyes they
met,

Treading an air so soft, so light, so fine,

That they were speechless, words they could
forget;

They only smiled, and shyly sipped their
wine,

And smiled again, and felt their full hearts
shine,

Talked breathlessly a little, and longed to
lean

Nearer, more near,—till no mote lay be-
tween,—

Not light or darkness, world or heaven or
star,

Not wind, nor warm, nor cold . . . but just
they two

Meeting at last, two spirits come from far,
Face raised to face, white flowers made sweet
with dew,—

Shining and passionate, and young and
new,—

Their two warm bodies singing each to each,

Mingling at last in love's harmonious
speech . . .

The lights, the noise, the tumult passed
away;

As in a dream without a sound they passed;
She only knew that it was wildly gay,
And shy, and bliss unbearable . . . At last
Under the high dark starward-gliding mast
In grateful night they sat; he brought her
coat

And trembling wrapped the scarf around her
throat;

Letting his fingers linger there a space,
Longer than there was need, so sweet she
smiled,

So close they were to that soft wistful
face . . .

The stars looked down upon them, clear and
mild . . .

Woman and maiden, girl, and little child,—
She was all these . . . A moment, he was
shaken,—

Lest he do wrong, lest he might prove mis-
taken . . .

Only a moment . . . passion rose again,
Quiet he took her hand and held it long,
And all her virgin heart grew big with pain,
And all her new-born body ached with song.
Blindly she prayed to God to make her
strong,—

More blindly cried to earth to make her
weak;
And looked at him, near tears, and could not
speak.

He was a loveliness she could not bear . . .
Like a fierce furnace seemed his beauty
now . . .

A fire that caught her throat, her lips, her
hair,

Her parching eyes, her pained and beating
brow.

Only to give herself,—she cared not how,—
Into the flame, body and soul to fling;
To have him hurt her,—ah, divinest
thing! . . .

Four bells were struck: 'twas ten o'clock he
said;

And still the sea rushed past, under the night.

The engines toiled and the great steamer
sped;

And they could see the bow-wash, dimly
white,

Fall into darkness ever; the mast-head light

Quivered among the stars, and in its fire

A span of fore-stay shone like golden
wire . . .

Little by little they were left alone,
The decks were emptied; only, from the bar,
Came shouts and laughter, and a drunkard's
groan,

And glasses clinking, and a strummed guitar.
The door shut, and the sounds grew faint
and far,

And all the deck was dark; only the sea
Lifted its great voice, like infinity.

O youth, O music, O sweet wizardry
Of young love sung like fire through beating
veins!

O covering darkness and persuasive sea!

O night of stars, of blisses and of pains!

But most, O youth that but an hour re-
mains,—

Be fierce, be sweet with us, before you go;
For knowing you the best of life we know!

Beneath his kiss her mouth rose soft and
warm,

And dewy soft as rose-leaves were her eyes,
Under his hands, shaken as with a storm
He felt her soft breast fall and shudder and
 rise,
Torn with impassioned breath, unuttered
 cries;
Quivering, straining breast against his breast,
She clung to him, her mouth on his mouth
 pressed . . .

And only knew that this was life at last,
Forgot all else in agony of bliss;
Into this fire of love all earth was cast;
The stars, the sea, were mingled in this kiss.
And through her heart the blood, with sing
 and hiss,
Poured a red madness, surged a riotous
 pain,—
Unbearable music cried out in her brain . . .

'O love,' he said, 'O let me come with you!

I love you so! This night,—O let me
come!'—

Ah God have pity! she knew not what to do,
But sat all quiet,—frozen, shrinking, dumb;
And only heard the toiling engines hum,
The rush of sea, the swish of dropping spray,
Her clamorous heart; and all that she could
say

Was a quick 'yes,' and then a broken breath
That quivered like a sob; and then she rose,
Dizzy and weak and pale, like one near
death,

And now her heart was fire, and now it
froze . . .

Faint in her room she stood; the door to
close,—

She might still turn the key . . . She cried
a space,—

Long in the glass stared at her pallid
face . . .

And heard a step tramp over the deck above,
Ringing like iron . . . The curtains by her
bed

Quivered forever to the engine's move,
And from the lamp a quivering light was
shed . . .

These things would all go on when she was
dead . . .

Trembling, with misty eyes, she loosed the
pin

Under her throat . . . mad fires whirled up
within . . .

Mad fires whirled up, engulfing all her soul;
Beyond the sun and stars, across all space,
Power that earth nor heaven could now con-
trol,

She heard her lover come, with quickening
pace;

Nowhere to hide! Alas. his shining face,
Though she hid under seas would find her
there,

Though she hid under mountains lay her
bare!

Across the stars, nearer, more near it came,
And now earth shook with it, and now the
sea,

And her white body, tremulous with shame,
From its sheer anguish knew that it was
he,—

Yearned for this wonder that was soon to be;
And all her heart made music for his feet,
All of the world re-echoed to their beat . . .

Marriage of youth! And quick a darkness
fell,

And time and space went down, consumed in
fire;

Through that dark space, only one breath, to
tell

That here was youth, and love, and wild de-
sire:

One heart that to itself sang ever higher,
Tremulous, passionate, despite all pain,—
'How wonderful!—how wonderful!'—again.

III.

October earth, with scarlet maple leaf,
With oak-leaves brown, with flaming leaves
and pale;

Mysterious autumn, symbol of all grief,
Symbol of lives that die and hopes that fail:
Now on the threshing-floor has fallen the
flail,

The hands are elsewhere that have stored
the grain;

Now comes the season of snows and bitter
rain.

Weeks passed . . . And then one day there
came a note

To New York for this youth . . . he tore
and read.

It was that girl he played with on the
boat . . .

Scarcely three shaky lines . . . in which she
said,

That she was sick with typhoid, nearly
dead,—

Wanted to say she loved him; then she cried,
O God, if he would come before she died!—

Loved him! . . . a blackness fell; and in his
eyes,

So long unused, and even now ashamed,
He felt the warm tears quickening to
rise . . .

Loved him!—he had not known . . . Could
he be blamed?—

Then a great light of sorrow in him flamed,
And bitterness, his sight swam quickly dim,—
Thinking how little it had meant to him!

Scarce knowing why, he packed his things
and went . . .

He was surprised, on seeing her, to find
How lovely she had been, though pale and
spent . . .

He sat beside her, striving to be kind,
Stroking her forehead . . . Yet, she had di-
vined,

And known too bitterly, before she died,
This man had never loved her, but had
lied. . . .

And he knew this: he knew that she had
known;

In her dark eyes he saw the mastered yearning,
ing,

All the unspoken love that died in moan,
Shrunk on itself, through all her body burning . . .

And many days the memory came returning
Of her last kiss,—quivering, wet with tears,—
Her clinging hands, her brimmed eyes dark
with fears . . .

Until at times a sudden terror came
Lest, through great pity, he should love one
dead,—

So burning sweet recurred in him this shame,
So haunted him those eyes, that fallen
head;

The lips that pleaded so, the words she
said,—

Pathetic words!—these haunted him a space;
Then, in the dark of time he lost her face . . .

O Autumn! bringing to old adventures death,
Sadness at all things past, things passing
still,—

You touched this love with strange and
dreadful breath;

Easy as leaf is human love to chill,—

Easy as leaf is human love to kill;

Yet beautiful is that death with sudden
flame,

Ere it goes down to darkness, whence it
came! . . .

EARTH TEDIUM.

I.

If part of earth, I am a sullen part,
A note discordant in her harmony;
For I cry out against her ceaselessly,
And bear a separate music in my heart;
Or if in truth my soul was born of earth,
Most strange that being her offspring I
should hate

Her who in anguish opened wide the gate
To blinding light of sun, the gate of birth!
Only in autumn do I feel with her;
As fall her leaves, so fall the leaves in me,
In borrowed splendor, dropping wearily,
Back to the dust wherefrom she bade them
stir.

Why did she wake, why bade she them to
rise?

What joy had they of life? Dream you they
heard

The cry of wind, or song of any bird:

Felt gratitude for rains or sunny skies?

Ah, I have often envied them for this:

They had no sorrows though they had no
bliss.

II.

For us, her special tortures were prepared;

Ah sorceress! through our unhappy veins

Music of intermingled loves and pains

Slowly she breathed; nor have we since been
spared.

May she have joy of us, so she desire!

And what escape? For her all life is sport;

No matter what illusions we may court,—

For you she scorns your glee, for me, my ire.

Shall I make brave sweet praise of life to
sing?

Lo, with her terrible mirth she shakes high
heaven;

Shall I cry out against this life I'm given?
Or sulk? No odds, she revels in the thing!
Yea, even if in my desperate plight I cry
'Earth has no soul, no sense, and knows us
not,

Or if she ever knew us has forgot,'—
Still am I conscious of a leering eye.
O falling leaves, let me go down with you
To lie insensible in dust and dew!

III.

Still, if she laughs whichever way we take,—
Methinks it were the shrewder thing to go
Such path as, wisely followed, brings least
woe,

Dreaming some dream least likely to awake.
Smiles she?— I care not. You exist not,
Earth!

Man is the thing: Most grave, most sure is
he;

What pleasures him, will it not pleasure
me?

So; I will sift the fine gold from his mirth.
Come, man! explain yourself to nakedness,
Tell me what wondrous ways you get your
bliss!

I fear there is some mystery in this: .

For what seems more to him, to me seems
less.

Lack I some precious thing, some inward
fire,—

Or have I too much light? Behold, a doubt.
Here is a music makes him sing and shout—
And makes me weep; his fear is my desire.
Man has great depths. . . . Methinks, then,
I'll go down

And find his soul. . . Who knows? . . .
and find a clown.

IV.

Yet if of earth, and if a sullen part;
Though I cry out against her ceaselessly;
Still do I find my life sweet harmony,
And bear a luminous music in my heart;
And I have laughed these many times this
day

At my poor brain, sad with eternal toil,
That, darkling, slowly digs in barren soil,
While birds sing, and my heart is out at play.
Poor anguished laborer! I love you well.
Most shrewd are you; your lightnings have
laid bare

Man's littleness to me, and your despair;
Your speech is wondrous, though you speak
of hell.

Most shrewd, most cruel—to man, to me, to
earth;

Keen hands that spare no blossom, rip all
bloom;

Yet I have laughed to see you ache with
doom,—

When all the while my heart, of other birth,
Had fled far from your darkness and your
rain,

Into the world to see the sun again.

V.

Shall I drain all my pulses for my song,
As poets do who squeeze their poor hearts
white,—

Bloodless and mute, (so they may only
write,)

Bartering all their flesh for one sweet
tongue?—

'Twere folly thus; they slay the self-same
joy

That moved their hearts to sing; so will
not I;

Rather, rejoice in this high autumn sky,
Greedy of pleasures as a thoughtless boy.

Rather, go walk the hills in whirling sun,—
In dancing moon,—in blowing leaves and
grass;

Watching sad autumn with her death-fires
pass,

And winter skies grow grey, and earth grow
dun;

And love her well whom blessed fate has
given,

Take, uncomplaining, daily joy and pain,
Bending my dripping face, if it should
rain,

To lift it high again when stars take heaven.

And, living so, my heart will sing, meseems,

Sweet of his own accord, undrugged by
dreams.

VI.

Is not the poet he who loves earth best,
Who knows her wisest, deepest, who, her
child,

Dreamily with her moods has wept and
smiled,

Waking and sleeping ever at her breast?

Not he, forsooth, who walks aloof, apart,
Looking askance at her. . . . O hapless
brain,

It is your madness that has brought me pain,
Weaning my heart from earth, its mother-
heart.

No more this land of mist and dark and cold!
No more these doubtings and this deep dis-
may!

Into the sun we go once more to play,
My heart is young, although my brain be old.
He cannot sing of life who lives so little:

Who loves not, hates not; come then, love
and hate,

While youth sings sweet, before it be too
late,—

Young eyes will pearl, and bones too soon are
brittle;

O falling leaves, my heart goes out to you,—

I live, while you go down to dust and dew!

VII.

You stars that shine this night so cold and
clear,

This autumn night, while fitful winds are
blowing;

Cold moon,—across whose face wild clouds
are flowing,—

Or swimming in an open azure space;

You stricken leaves, to whom this night
brings death,

Burned by this frost, and by this wind blown
down,

Yellows and reds that soon will be but brown,
Wearied with rains, now palsied at a breath;
All things deciduous that fall away,
When seasons change and generous suns are
gone;

All things that droop with night, that lift
with dawn,

All things that stay, or only seem to stay;
You moon decadent, and you waning sun,
To whom will yet succeed more suns and
moons;

You seas that ebb and flow by barren dunes,
Whose flowing and whose ebbing soon are
done:

All ye, bear witness: though my days be
few,

Greatly I live, who shared one birth with
you!

VIII.

Bear witness, Earth, that I have loved you
well,

Before my brain grew arrogant and proud;
I was a part of wind and star and cloud,
Most sweet and earthly did my young heart
smell.

Most sweet and earthly! Sweet as woods
of fir,

As gentle clover fields that drowse in sun;
Keen as the winds that over cold seas run,
Pure as the breath that blows from Alpine
spur!

Have I not tip-toed like a summer air
Into your roses, nor disturbed their sleep?
Yet tryst with terrible typhoon could I keep,
Whitening seas and laying green earth bare.
I have been seed, and drunk of sun and rain;
Felt the sure creeping bliss of opening
flower;

Flared up and blackened under autumn's
power;

Frozen in sod, been stretched in moveless
pain.

All these and more I've been, in grief and
mirth:

Yea, I have loved you well,—bear witness,
Earth!

IX.

True song, meseemeth, is but happiness,
And he that sings of grief sings not at all;
Let him make moan,—like sere leaf let him
fall;

But we need tune of joy, of hardiness.

O youth! you are the sweetest song of earth,
Her heart's true music; prithee stay with
me;

Though I grow old still let me youthful be,
Let my grey ashes glow with central mirth.

And let a warmth be ever in my eyes,
Nor the sure snows of winter slake their
fire,—

Let them be bright with ever young desire;
I would be glad,—let other men be wise!

—Pale leaves,—although your burying time
is near,

Though wild winds whirl you, yet be not dis-
mayed:

You shall again make green some sunny
glade,

You shall make glee with moon another year!

—True song is this; I flout the cynic brain,—

Saying, “like these dead leaves, I live again!”

X.

Pitiless rain, that, ceaseless, all night long
Unwearying, beatest on this world like
pain,—

Pelting dead leaves till they would go in-
sane

If they had soul, or ear to hear your song:

O heartless rain! how like man's grief you
are,

How like untoward fortune, desperate fate,
That beats him down in blindness, not in
hate,

And all unwitting crushes his life's star!

From grey sky falling, purposeless as grief,
Falling forever, needless, born of chance,
Without a soul, most desolately you dance,
Making a night-long dirge on bough and
leaf.

And like a dead leaf all night long I've lain
Borne down by you and powerless to rise,
And felt you tireless beating on my eyes,
And on my naked heart your pattering pain.
Whence came you, from what sadness were
you born,

Symbol of all that's mournful and for-
lorn?

XI.

A world of paradox! Lo, in all sorrow
Some sweetness lurks, and laughter in all
tears;

And often he desires who also fears,
And pain of bliss and bliss of pain do bor-
row;

Man's soul, meseems, was under April skies
Engendered; mixture strange of green and
grey,—

The wayward wonder-child of March and
May,

Black rains, bright sun, and tears in laugh-
ing eyes.

And this cold vale, shrinking beneath a
cloud,

Grown old with fear,—lo, in a moment's
space,

Lifts to the hurried sun a mirthful face,

Out of the darkness shining, sweet and
proud.

And this rain, now, that pitiless, heartless
seems,

Pelting dead leaves, beating earth's bosom
bare,

Mingles a song of love with its despair,
And where it wounds instils a breath of
dreams;

—Love has its secret sadness, like this rain,
And in all fruitfulness there lurks a pain.

INNOCENCE.

LET me be always one with earth

Who bade her music through me run,
Who through my veins poured singing
mirth,

Made me a dancer in her sun!
Out of her living dust she made,—

The dust that once was leaves and trees;
Grey dust of roses long decayed,

Still warm with life of birds and bees;
The dust of grass, the dust of clover,

High forests that have long been dead,
And dust of many a laughing lover,

Whose songs are running in my head. . .
All that earth has been, all she is,

Her musics and her ecstasies,
Cold winter rains, warm rains of spring,
And the slow sun that makes her sing,—

I know them all, all earth's in me,

I am earth's child, and I am earth;

At one with her in grief and glee,

I dream, with her, through death and
birth.

While I am living, give me speech

Unconscious as the song of birds,

So I may sing earth's praise, and teach

Her beauty, though in broken words;

When I am dead, let leaf and bough,

And small grass, and anemone,

Have this sweet life that I have now:

Earth, bid your lovers rise from me!

SOPHISTICATION.

THIS man, I thought, had come too far
From the warm sunrise of his birth,
For he had followed and lost a star,
And now he had no love for earth;
But with pale face and empty eyes,
Listless, as all who've grown too wise,
With a sad absent step he came,
And loved no thing and loved no man;
No youth-fire through his spirit ran,
His light was but a candle flame.
I watched him like a lost soul meet
The living crowds that filled the street,
And he looked upon them hungrily,
And sought their faces wistfully,
As if to say, 'it is not much,
I only ask of you a touch;'
For they were warmer, he divined,

Their hearts were young, while his was old,
Their hands were warm, while his were cold,
Their souls were fire-light, bright and kind.
Only to pass them in the street,
These humbler folk who never thought,
Some wonder in his spirit wrought,
His heart re-heard some ancient beat.
And he had fleeting glimpse of sun,
A moment saw the splendor run
Between bright edges of the grey,
Whirled in a space of dazzling blue,—
The sky he'd known in childhood's day
Ere wisdom's sunless heaven he knew. . .
Then to his soul, a twilight room,
Returning, he would sit in gloom;
Musing his life, his time away
Slow night by night, dim day by day.

Through this grey spirit's twilight air
I think there often rose a prayer,
Unspoken, uttered without words,

Unconscious as the speech of birds,
A prayer, and yet to no god made,
Since of no god was he afraid;
To his own soul, perhaps, addressed;
Or Earth, to take him to her breast
And warm him there, in sun, in rain,
In wind, in cold, in blight of stars,
To give him life, with bliss and pain,
To make new blood beat in old scars:
So he might feel with death and birth,
Be moved to dance with morning-mirth,
Laugh in the sun, be sad with rains,
And feel earth stirring in his veins;
Feel wind on bough blow cool or warm,
And old leaves torn away by storm,
Feel cold rain-bubbles round a root,
And sun take dew from April shoot. . .
In apathy his feet had moved,
He never hated, never loved;
One by one and silently
The few who knew and loved him died,

Went seaward with the quiet tide,
Passed into greyness, quietly,
And left behind no hurt in him,
Nor left his searching eyes more dim.
For they had died like winter's grass,
The new would come, the old must pass.

In youth, he loved philosophy,
He learned its sad satiety;
And with a grey net, dreamlike fine,
He netted moon and star and sun,
The universe; but ah, that done,
He found his caught stars would not shine.
Caught sun and earth had ceased their song,
Too late he learned that truth is wrong
When it takes sunlight out of things,
And that the snared bird never sings. . .
Too late he learned this, too late knew
Philosophy is only true
When it sings out of brimful mirth,
Perfumed and flower-like out of earth,

And theory only then is truth
When it is youth's own praise of youth.
Life is not earth's life, when it turns
Against itself with morbid knife,
Only the dim towards dimness yearns,
That life is sick that questions life;
And this he knew, but knew too late,
For he had passed through wisdom's gate
And seen of what stuff life is made,—
The thin web woven out of dust,
Destroyed then by a foolish gust,—
Dust in blossom and dust decayed,
Endless and aimless. . . . Come so far
In search of truth's ignoble star
He faltered, turned, and ah, would then
Have fain been even as other men,
Dreamless and thoughtless, wise in mirth,
Wise in ignorance, roots of earth;
Taking their lives of kiss and pain
As calm trees take the sun and rain;
Taking their daylight seriously,

Wise, in their fools' serenity.
But who has seen truth through his brain
Hardly shall he return again
To live in senses, nothing more;
A hollow sea-shell flung ashore,
Life has no use for him, nor sings
Her warm song in him, he is sped;
He hears the lost sea's murmurings,
A ghost wind roaring through his head,
But that is all, he cannot move,
He dreams, but cannot hate or love.

All this he knew in bitterness,
And strove with in his loneliness.
Of truth a little cell he made
Wherein from year to year he stayed;
Seeing, through one bright window's space
The moon and all the stars go by,
And Earth, a young and lovely place,
And bright sun, swimming in bright sky.
Once he had known it,—that was past;

Now in a cell had he been cast,
His cunning brain had built dark bars
Between him and the specious stars.

His greatest sorrow, I think, was this:
To know that earth, however sweet
Her memory came to him, to meet
And give him her maternal kiss,
Could never satisfy again
His merciless thrice-accursed brain;
He could look back and see her fair,
Yet knew he'd sorrow were he there.
A long while he had hoped, I think,
That some day he might deeply drink
Love from a woman's living mouth
And so put end to this long drouth.
He had looked much on lips and eyes,
And hungered for this miracle;
Alas, he knew this sham too well,
He was too scrupulously wise.
All magic but illusion is,

Illusion are love's ecstasies,
He saw too keenly, drove away
This magic by the light of day. . .
And though perhaps the woman came
Destined by earth to set him free,
His cold soul could not kindled be,
He saw the texture of the flame.
His mouth to hers he may have pressed,
Searched eyes, and yearned to be at rest;
But he saw keenly, drove away
This magic by bright light of day. . .
How often, in what sordid ways,
How pitiful, with wistful gaze,
He sought for love,—hoping to find
Some human soul, some star-eyed face,
Sweetly to capture him and bind,
And give his soul a resting-place!
Some girl, some woman, magic-sweet,
With shining face and dancing feet,
Laughing, untameable and wild,
Heedless and thoughtless, earth's true child,

So living, and so wisely young,
With such sweet music on her tongue,
That he might cease to be so wise
And learn earth's passion at her eyes!
And the young harlots in the street,
These he followed with timid feet,
And the young maids who lit his gloom
Singing and dusting in his room,
He talked with, trembling, shy of face,
Yearning for this imagined grace. . .
Yearning to have one thing to love,
One face to make his still heart move,
One face to die for, bid him ache,
One heart to make his own heart break. . .
Alas, if flame there was, he came
Like salamander through that flame.
He heard love speak the magic word,
His heart was mute, it never stirred.

And so, to ease his banishment,
Wearily, year by year, he went

To theatre, cinematograph,
That haply he might cry or laugh,
Or swiftly taken unaware
Feel a cold horror creep his hair.
Often he smiled his cynic smile;
But felt well paid if every while
Suddenly came a gust of grief
Shaking his soul's trees, or a joy. . .
Afterwards, laughter might destroy. . .
But ah, what infinite relief!

So came the years and took him then
Quietly from the sight of men,
Unwept, unmissed. . . At times it seemed,
Or so he in his twilight dreamed,
That one so utterly without breath,
Unearthly even, might escape
Earth's restless change, by men called
death,—

And keep forever one grey shape. . .
Now he is dead. So, every day,

Too subtle musing leads astray.
This man, I thought, had come too far
From the warm sunrise of his birth;
For he had followed and lost a star,
And then, had no more love for earth.

LAUGHTER.

(Youth Speaks to His Own Old Age.)

You, whom these eyes, no longer mine,
Shall see in the mirror's flash and shine,
Meagre of face and pale of cheek,
Pale mouth, and lines that sadness speak:
All the grey shipwreck of this me
Who look upon you and laugh for glee,
Mocking at you, poor feeble thing,
You word that's uttered, you tune that's
 played,
You body shrunken, you soul decayed,
You heart that whispers but cannot sing:
You, when you walk abroad in sun,
Blinking at last for the too much light,
Scorning the young life that can run,
Scorning the fierce life that can fight,

And drooling wisdom day by day,
Presuming, you, to point the way:
Here are my eyes upon you, now,
Colder than stars to sear your brow,
Here is my hand upon your hand,
A stronger grip than yours can stand,
Here are my words, so cruelly true,—
If you be false, they are stones for you. . .
And because you are feeble, a crawling thing,
Walking by walls to hold and cling,
With terror of darkness on your breath,
And terror lest you be dead, with death:
Catching perhaps at straws of faith,
Drunk with religion in hope to drown
These maddening truths that will not down,
Clutching philosophy's vapid wraith:
Here is my perfect scorn for you,
The scorn from youth to old age due,
Merciless laughter, sharp as knife,
The egotistical laugh of life.
I hold my sides!—let truth be said,

'Twere better if things like you were dead.
For I have strength to face this earth,
I am risen warm and strong from birth,
I am song, I am love, I am bitter hate,
The laughter of speed that will not wait.
Nature is hard, but hard am I,
The hard will live, the soft must die:
And I who am nature know this truth,—
The soul of nature's soul is youth.
If you deny me, turn to shame,
Or pity me,—forego my name;
For youth is right, and age is wrong—
You but a prayer, while I am song!

The weak hates strong: you will hate me,
And war upon me, with cunning wiles,—
Pity me, with indulgent smiles,
And shrug your shoulders paternally.
'Mad youth!' you'll murmur—'how mad
it is!
He must indulge his ecstasies!

Youth is a madness, it will pass,
The fever of blood, the mad blind eyes—
His stars will burn him, he'll grow wise,
The years bring calm to lad and lass.
And what we thought so fine in youth
Was at the most but half of truth,—
For truth is not of youth or age,
But sum of life's whole pilgrimage,—
The young men's visions, the old men's
dreams,
The passion of days, the thought of years;
Age's cautions, and youth's extremes;
Laughter is life no more than tears.
Youth sings, "the height of life is youth,
All after that is retrograde,
The music falters, the flowers fade,
And falsehood masquerades as truth."
Youth sings, "Age hath no right to speak,
Nature abhors him, he is weak,
But youth is right, for youth is strong,
Youth is the young earth's bridal-song!"

I was a young man once, myself,
Youth, I can sympathize with you;
I speak impartially from my shelf—
Truth lies half way between the two.
Youth scorns old age,—well, youth is right,
That is youth's nature; age scorns youth,
Age too is just; each sees the light
As nature grants, and each sees truth. . .
For truth is not of youth or age,
But sum of life's whole pilgrimage,
A wonder of many wonders wrought,
Blended of passion and of thought;
And so, young man, we'll compromise—
Each of us, in our way, is wise!'

Thus you will speak, O cunning one,
Warming your cold hands in the sun;
Squinting your eyes in too bright light,
Shielding your face's sickly white.
However weak, life fends for self,—
Thus *you*, old ghost! you shuffling trimmer!

You speak impartially from your shelf?—
You clutch at rays, for the light grows dim-
mer.

This much I'll not begrudge you, then—
Go, justify yourself to men,
With powers of darkness come to terms
Lest you turn sick with dread of worms.
But, for the hard work of my brain,
Hands off! your yellow hands would stain.
Our best work, youth's! one finger mars;
If you must loathe it, or disclaim,
I beg you, then, forego my name,—
Else, die, mid laughter from the stars!

And yet, what's life? Come, here's my hand.
For at the last, I see it well,
Age were not age unless it fell,
And crawls—because it cannot stand.
I pity you,—I laugh at you,—
Yet to your years I see you true,
Truer than if, with rigid thought,

Your age to ghost of youth you wrought.
Poor soul! go, make your peace with death,
And warm your heart with a shibboleth!
Yes, you will hate, despise my work,—
How else?—But here's my laughing dirk,
Here I have snared you, all complete,
Your pitiful pale hands, struggling feet;
If you breathe poison on my art
Here is my poniard, here your heart! . . .
Because you are aged, senile, lamed,
For this, man, you shall not be blamed,
Though youth must smirk old age to see,
And merriment bubbles up in me;
But if with hand that smears and mars
You touch our best work, yours and mine,—
Then comes my laughter from earth and
stars,
Youthful and cruel, wild, divine!

YOUTH IMPERTURBABLE.

LET me not shrink at sight of death,
Nor waste in grief an idle breath. . .
You whom I loved are one with clay,
The brightness in your eyes is gone,
I shall not meet your face to-day;
Your day is done, while mine goes on. . .
Why pity you? You had your fling;
You had your chance to dance and sing,—
To love, to hate, to kiss, to kill,
To laugh and cry and drink your fill:
Now it is ended: so comes end
To every lover, every friend;
The lips turn white, the warm eyes glaze,
The music-box no longer plays,
And so we hide you under earth
And laugh to sun our wonted mirth. . .

Let me not shrink at sight of death,
Nor waste in grief an idle breath. . .

This buried something—is it you?
Is this decay the man I knew?
You, whose hand was warm in mine,
Whose eyes I saw with music shine,
Who laughed with me and walked with me,
And in your grave way scolded me?—
Well, and so fares it with us all,—
When autumn comes the leaf must fall,
Nor shall I dusk one single day
By mourning for what now is clay.
One of my joys is haply dead,
One song is sung, one word is said,
One laughter dies and leaves behind
Only an echo in my mind. . .
Let me not shrink: I will be stern.
For better or worse you had your turn.
Grief for the dead is foolish grief,
A childish thing, a selfish thing,—

One voice cannot for always sing,—
Even for us is pleasure brief;—
Nor can our tears and temper stay
The hand that snatches joy away.
For you, your golden sun has set,
But I have much to laugh at yet.

Let me not shrink at sight of death
Nor waste in grief an idle breath. . .
Life is a dance;—O dance it then,
You blind and fatuous hosts of men!
Lift your pale faces to the sun,
And laugh and shout and sing and run;
While he is warm and bright and red
Dance on the bodies of your dead,
Life is the thing,—the song of life,—
The eager plow, the thirsty knife!
Exult, all sorrows past forget,—
Laugh, there is much to laugh at yet,—
Tear down the pallid things you hate,—
Rip open earth's heart for your mate!

This buried something,—is it you?
Is this decay the man I knew?
Here's nought but dirt—here's nought but
dust—

It has no gleam of laugh or lust,
Nor does it say a word to me,
Nor reach a warm hand up to me.
Are you become but leaf and grass,
Intricate roots that mat and mass
And thirstily hold and suck the rain?
Here for a half year you have lain,
Quiet as earth is . . . are you earth?
Share you with her some secret mirth?

Foolish of me to think you here,
Where you were buried! . . . Now you are
Diffused through all earth, everywhere,
And look at me from every star.
So will it be with me in time,
Even for me this sun must set;
But I am still in my laughing prime,
O I have much to laugh at yet!

YOUTH PENETRANT.

I SHALL grow calm in a little while,
But now, youth yearns in me to laugh;
Cruel as cinematograph
I show life up to you . . . and smile.
I shall be calm in a little space,—
The blood grows quieter with the years;
I shall be tenderer, then, to tears,
And look more kindly on life's face.
Our hearts grow mellow nearing death—
Like apples touched with autumn breath—;
When the dusk falls and day is done
We look more wistfully on the sun,
Loving his last warmth on our cheek;
We can be kind when we are weak.
I shall be calm in a little while,
But now, youth yearns in me to laugh;
Cruel as cinematograph

I show life up to you . . . and smile.
Merciless is this black and white,
A cold inquisitorial light;
Baleful, it makes all life seem base,
Shows you the flesh of every face;
Only the music makes it seem
So brightly glamorous, so like dream. . .
Let the musician cease to play,
Here's naught but black and white and grey,
Reality, cold, mechanical,—
The truth—a hideous spectacle! . .
Cruel as cinematograph
I show life up to you . . . and laugh;
For that is youth's prerogative:
To see life coldly through brave eyes,
To strip life of its lovely lies,
And, careless of the dead, to live.
There is yet time, when I grow old,
When the blood in me is slow and cold,
To look on life with wistful gaze,
To see life through a soft bright haze;—

Singing more sweetly, as they use
Who are half death's, and hourly lose
The light that fades from misting eyes,
So, praise life in most passionate wise;
For in their clouded minds they dream
The whole day, though it was but dun,
Made glorious by the death of sun,—
Death-fires the fires of life they deem.
Through mist they wander, singing sweet;—
Singing of life to make them brave,
They hear death digging each his grave,
They feel his cold net touch their feet. . .
Half-lives, they only half-life sing,
The tender light their dim eyes see;
They reach pale hands to earth and cling,
Grief gives their song intensity. . .
I shall be calm in a little while,
But now, youth yearns in me to laugh:
Cruel as cinematograph
I show life up to you . . . and smile!

PARASITICS: TO CERTAIN POETS.

WHO are you, now, that thus presume
To come with candle to my gloom?
Think you your candle-tip can shine
With more illustrious light than mine?
Think you my fire sheds not so far,—
Was yours begotten of a star?—
Leave me: your face and eyes are pale,
The faint words on your faint lips fail,
There is no warm blood in your veins,
You know no human joys and pains.
Let him, him only, sing of life
Who out of terrible triumph sings,
Whose soul comes glittering like a knife,
With savage laughter cuts and flings!
Out of the livid soil he came,
A naked shape as pure as flame,
His hands are red with dust and death,

His eyes flash fires of loves and hates,
For him the moon and sun are gates,
There is deep music in his breath!
This is the singer whom I love,
Unto whose music I will move.

Not he who sits till late at night
And shivers in his candle-light,
Shutting his eyes to this warm earth,
Seeking for some far stranger birth. . .
Under the twilight seas he goes.
He weaves, fantastic, skull and rose.
The sleet upon his window-pane
Goads his flagging wits again
Farther from earth and yet more far
He dreams of haunted moon and star. . .
Drunk is he in a hasheesh spell,
Frenzied he sings of heaven and hell. . .
Leave me. Your face and eyes are pale,
The faint words on your faint lips fail,

There is no warm blood in your veins,
You know no human joys and pains.

O ghostly shape! I pity you.
Nothing of life you ever knew.
With wistful eyes you muse and dream
And watch life's spectacle go by;
Your heart will never laugh or cry,
Things are not felt by you, but seem.
As the fear-stricken ghost will run
When cock shrills up the ruddy sun,
So in the wholesome light of day
Your tenuous substance melts away. . .
You are a vampire, and are fed
By kiss of those whose blood is red.

Let me not hear your faint sweet tongue!
Such songs were better left unsung:
Better the pale lips were not stirred
For utterance of this febrile word.
It is a strange, a ghastly thing

To hear a dead man softly sing
Of roses long since turned to dust
And loves that long since turned to lust;
Of lutes that tuned some lost romance,
Of broken hearts, of lovers dead,
Of leaves upon the green grave shed
Where come the gleeful rains to dance. . .
Let me not hear your faint sweet tongue,
Such songs were better left unsung.

Have you had lovers in the night,
Lovers as savage as the stars?
Bears your pale heart the smouldering scars
Of love that's cruel, love fanged to fight?
Know you the mouth that hides a hiss,
The Lamia's mouth that drinks a kiss
Insatiable and languorous,
The red mouth greedy still in sleep?
Know you the love that's tyrannous,
The taloned love that makes you weep?

Know you these things? . . . Ah, you have
read

In many a well-bound book instead.

You have not loved! I know it well.

You have no lore of love to tell,—

No lore of hate; you never thrilled

In the warm blood of him you killed! . .

Sometimes, perhaps, you cry or laugh,

Moved by the cinematograph. . .

But flesh and blood! You know them not;

Only your little pallid dreams,

Wan hopes and fears and color schemes,—

If you knew more, it is forgot. . .

. . . Who are you, then, that thus presume

To come with candle to my gloom?

Think you your candle-tip can shine

With more illustrious light than mine?

Think you my fire sheds not so far?

Was yours begotten of a star?

I will not hear you. Leave me, then.

Warm your heart in the world of men.

Learn to laugh and learn to cry,—
So, you may sing to us, by and bye!

O sun of morning, sun of eve,
O brilliant noons of healthy eyes,
Shrivel this ghost beneath bright skies,—
Consume him, lest he further grieve,
With the almighty laugh of life,
Dazzling and vibrant as a knife!
Let him hear now his own heart sing,
A terrible and triumphant thing,
Masterful, tender, fierce and sweet,
A heart of warm and cosmic beat!
Let him see earth through eyes not dim,
Let loves and hates be dear to him:
Let him be stained with dust and death,
Confess his kinship with the earth;
He will be fired with mighty mirth,
There will be music in his breath!

DILEMMA.

I.

Not for the sordid do we seek,
In the dark alleys of our earth,
Nor yearn of ugliness to speak,
To lift a song of gutter-mirth.
But there is life in everything,
It is of life that we must sing,
And lo, from sordid and from base
Passion can lift a shining face.

Too long have we been fed on dreams,
And strained our eyes for elfin gleams,
And we have been content too long
To close our eyes in making song,—
To sing of lives we never knew,
Of lands we never suffered through. . .

II.

Hirelings are we of the time.
God pity us! For we must seek
In city filth, in streets that reek,
Dark inspiration for our rhyme.
Lo, here are folk who day by day
Weary their bodies just to live;
They ask for song: what will you give?
They want no song of far away.

If you would please them, you must sing
"This life of yours—a lovely thing!
The sun itself was not so sweet
As this pervasive modern grey!
You dance in such a charming way!
What need of wings since you have feet?"
—And we must lift a song to praise
These feverish nights and sooty days,
The anguish and the ugliness,
The loves and hates of tired men,

So they may rise from weariness
And take their daily work again. . .
What we think beauty, truth,—who cares?
We must heal man of his despairs.

So blame us not, earth's sons are we:
Earth bids us sing a modern ditty,—
To hide the greyness of your city,
To hide your modern misery;
This life of yours—a lovely thing!
How it compels our hearts to sing!
When we have sung you'll go your way,
Complacent, for another day.

Hirelings are we of the time.
God pity us! For we must seek
In city filth, in streets that reek,
Dark inspiration for our rhyme.

III.

And yet, from sordid and from base,
Passion can lift a shining face. . .

And walking through a street at night
I saw a jail in soft moonlight;
And there, behind the chequered bars,
A still shape came to look at stars. . .

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